PARTISAN REVIEW

PR

108

SUMMER, 1955

GOTTFRIED BENN
Artists and Old Age

ALBERTO MORAVIA
Portrait of Machiavelli

URSULA BRUMM
Faulkner: Wilderness and Civilization

ALWYN LEE
Something for Bradshaw's Tombstone
(a story)

ALBERT CAMUS
A Writer and His Time

SIMON O. LESSER
The Image of the Father

LESLIE A. FIEDLER
The Spell of the 'Twenties

Poems and reviews by G. L. Arnold, William Barrett, Buddhadeva Bose, Denis Devlin, Allan Dowling, R. W. Flint, John Hollander, Steven Marcus, Lenore G. Marshall

3

$1.00

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EZRA POUND'S "MAUBERLEY"

By John J. Espey

A study in composition in which Pound's much-discussed poem sequence, **Hugh Selwyn Mauberley,** is examined to clarify obscurities and to show his use of sources.
140 pages $2.75

THE CELESTINA

Translated by Lesley Byrd Simpson

The first English translation since 1631 of a fifteenth-century Spanish masterpiece, whose central character ranks with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.
174 pages $3.50

TIME IN LITERATURE

By Hans Meyerhoff

An analysis of the treatment of time in literature, and its relationship to science and philosophy, with particular reference to such writers as Joyce, Proust, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Wolfe, and Thomas Mann.
174 pages $3.50

HERDER: HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT

By Robert T. Clark, Jr.

A comprehensive biography of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), literary critic, poet, essayist, folklorist, linguist, and philosopher of history. One of the commanding figures of European culture.
514 pages $6.50

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Address: Berkeley 4, California

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Distinguished books from VIKING

The definitive book on America's most controversial decade

THE TWENTIES

by FREDERICK J. HOFFMAN

This major survey of American writing in the postwar decade is a bold and perceptive picture of a remarkable cultural era, correcting popular distortions and exploring the mainsprings of its creative genius. "Not until now has there been anything so generally comprehensive or so admirably synthesized as Hoffman's acute presentation of one of the great and formative periods of American writing. . . . A stimulating chapter in the spirit of our century."
—NORMAN HOLMES PEARSON, *Yale University* $6.00

Her finest prose writings, collected for the first time

PREDILECTIONS

by MARIANNE MOORE

In choosing the best of her prose works for inclusion in this volume, Miss Moore reveals her predilections among the modern poets, including Eliot, Auden, Stevens, Pound, and Cummings, and from her intimate knowledge, richly illuminates their writing. In addition, there are excursions into other arts, and a vivid reminiscence of the epoch-making days of *The Dial* magazine, of which Miss Moore was so vital a part. $3.50

"Bound to be one of the significant volumes of 1955"
—Saturday Review

THE OPPOSING SELF

by LIONEL TRILLING

In these nine warm and lively essays, Lionel Trilling ranges from Keats to George Orwell to show the various forms the human self assumes in literature. "One of the few critics . . . who can write limpidly, humanely, undogmatically about any and every book that interests him. . . . He is constantly instructive, eminently readable, always refreshing. . . . Mr. Trilling is enormously sensitive to the anxieties of this age."
—PERRY MILLER, *The Nation* $3.50

THE VIKING PRESS • 18 East 48th St., New York 17

Publishers of The Columbia—VIKING DESK ENCYCLOPEDIA

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

YALE BOOKS

A HISTORY OF MODERN CRITICISM

by RENE WELLEK

"One of the finest achievements of American scholarship . . . his work comes out just at the time it is most needed, when the most remarkable period of American criticism has fully asserted itself but needs a strengthening of historical orientation before advancing further; a time also, when American scholarship, fully aware at last of the interplay of scholarship and criticism, is looking for the sort of enlightenment and guidance which this book provides." *Norman Foerster*

Volume I
The Later 18th Century $4.50

Volume II
The Romantic Age $5.50

TRAGIC THEMES IN WESTERN LITERATURE

edited with an introduction by CLEANTH BROOKS

Seven essays ranging in subject from Sophocles to T. S. Eliot, renewing our perception of the masterpieces with which they deal and demonstrating the "ultimate oneness of man." Contributors include Bernard Knox, Chauncey B. Tinker, Henri Peyre, Richard B. Sewall, Konstantin Reichardt, Maynard Mack, and Louis Martz. $2.75

AT YOUR BOOKSTORE
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW HAVEN 7 CONN

CONTRIBUTORS

ALWYN LEE is an Australian, now living in New York, whose fiction has appeared in various magazines, including **Harper's Bazaar.**

URSULA BRUMM is a young German critic, who spent last year at Harvard doing graduate work in American literature.

SIMON O. LESSER's essay is a part of a longer study, entitled **The Appeal of Fiction,** which he completed under a series of grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and while a research associate at the University of Chicago.

STEVEN MARCUS, who is now in the army, has a degree from Columbia and did graduate work at Cambridge.

LESLIE A. FIEDLER's collection of essays, **An End to Innocence,** was published this spring by the Beacon Press.

G. L. ARNOLD's Pattern of World Conflict will be published here this fall by the Dial Press. Mr. Arnold, who lives in London, was formerly an editor of the English magazine **Twentieth Century.**

JOHN HOLLANDER has published poetry in a number of magazines. He was on the faculty of the University of Indiana, and is presently teaching at Harvard.

The American Press

A publisher with standards invites your attention. No condescending, misleading promises, no high-pressure sales devices—such as you may already have experienced. Just honest, careful subsidy publishing, by book people—which is rare enough!

Write or mail your manuscript directly:

THE AMERICAN PRESS
Att.: Mr. Crawford
489 Fifth Ave., N. Y 17

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

New DEVIN-ADAIR Books

44 IRISH SHORT STORIES: An Anthology of Short Irish Fiction from Yeats to Frank O'Connor. Edited by Devin A. Garrity. These stories combine lyricism, humor and tragedy with rare imagination set in simple backgrounds. The seemingly effortless art of the best Irish writers has an appeal that is naive and highly sophisticated at the same time. This is the first time in America that the more representative examples of Irish short fiction have been gathered. The emphasis is on variety, and all are a delight to read. 512 pages, $5.00.

JOURNEY THROUGH DREAD: A Study of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre. By Arland Ussher. Ireland's brilliant existentialist philosopher examines the three major contributors to existential philosophy. Full of the verve and vigor that have won him praise on both sides of the Atlantic, Mr. Ussher's work is an intelligent, sometimes controversial, and always stimulating study in modern philosophy. The three subjects come alive under an original, witty, urbane hand. 320 pages, $4.00.

REFLECTIONS ON THE FAILURE OF SOCIALISM. By Max Eastman. In the beautiful prose for which he is famous, Mr. Eastman presents the most persuasively argued case against the Marxian-Fabian Socialist ideology that has yet appeared. 128 pages, $2.75.

Published by

The DEVIN-ADAIR COMPANY

23 East 26th Street New York 10

A New Concept of

Academic Freedom

by Russell Kirk

Author of
THE CONSERVATIVE MIND

and

A PROGRAM
FOR CONSERVATIVES

"A brilliant and exciting study."
—*New York Times*

"We recommend it to every teacher in the country and to every American citizen."
—*New York Daily News*

"Russell Kirk is a real thinker."
—*St. Louis Register*

$3.75
At Your Local Bookstore

HENRY REGNERY CO.
Chicago 4

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PARTISAN REVIEW

EDITORS:
William Phillips, Philip Rahv

ASSOCIATE EDITOR:
William Barrett

ADVERTISING AND BUSINESS MANAGER:
Barbara Greenfeld

ADVISORY BOARD:
Allan D. Dowling, Sidney Hook,
James Johnson Sweeney, Lionel Trilling

PARTISAN REVIEW is published quarterly by the Foundation for Cultural Projects, Inc. at 513 Sixth Ave., New York 11, N. Y. Subscriptions: $4 a year, $6.50 for two years, foreign subscriptions, including Canada, $4.50 a year, $7.50 for two years. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency or with $0.75 added for collection charges. Single copy: $1.00. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Copyright 1955, by PARTISAN REVIEW. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. under the act of March 3, 1879.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SUMMER, 1955 VOLUME XXII, NUMBER 3

CONTENTS

ARTISTS AND OLD AGE, Gottfried Benn 297

SOMETHING FOR BRADSHAW'S TOMBSTONE, Alwyn Lee 320

WILDERNESS AND CIVILIZATION:
A NOTE ON WILLIAM FAULKNER, Ursula Brumm 340

MR. ALLEN, Denis Devlin 351

TRANSFORMATIONS, Buddhadeva Bose 352

A DREAM OF BIRTH, Allan Dowling 353

PORTRAIT OF MACHIAVELLI, Alberto Moravia 357

THE IMAGE OF THE FATHER, Simon O. Lesser 372

THE LIVING WHITMAN, R. W. Flint 391

THE STORIES OF ISAAC BABEL, Steven Marcus 400

MEXICAN NIGHT, Lenore G. Marshall 411

BOOKS

THE ANT ON THE GRASSHOPPER, Leslie A. Fiedler 412

THE PRIVATE PHILOSOPHY, G. L. Arnold 418

KLEE AND STEINBERG, John Hollander 422

THE ITALIAN QUALITY, William Barrett 426

VARIETY

A WRITER AND HIS TIME, Albert Camus 429

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LANDSCAPE

Magazine of Human Geography

Contents of Spring 1955 Issue:

OASIS AND DESERT. John Skolle. COMMUNIST THEORY IN ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING. CHINESE LANDSCAPE AS SYMBOL. Otto Fischer. HORSE AND BUGGY COUNTRYSIDE. Edgar Anderson. NOTES AND COMMENTS. BOOK REVIEWS.

Published three times a year. Subscription $2.00.
75 Cents a copy. Box 73, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Announcing the 1956

HARPER $10,000

PRIZE NOVEL CONTEST

Any unpublished novel in the English language is eligible. No entry form is needed. But each manuscript must be accompanied by a letter stating that it is submitted for the Contest and has never been published in book form. To be eligible, manuscripts must be received in the publisher's offices before the end of the business day, June 1, 1956.

The Judges:

HAMILTON BASSO novelist, author of *The View from Pompey's Head, The Green Room,* etc.

ORVILLE PRESCOTT daily book critic of the *New York Times.*

JESSAMYN WEST novelist, author of *Cress Delahanty, The Witchdiggers, The Friendly Persuasion,* etc.

Send manuscripts or write to:

The Harper Prize Novel Contest
HARPER & BROTHERS
49 East 33rd St., New York 16, N. Y.

LIBERAL PRESS, INC.
printers of
PARTISAN REVIEW
•
80 FOURTH AVENUE
NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AIKEN ARENDT AUDEN AUERBACH BABEL BALDWIN BARKER
BARRETT BARZUN BELLOW
BERRYMAN BISHOP BLACKMUR
BOWLES BURNHAM CAMUS CHASE
CHIAROMONTE CLARK CONNOLLY
DAVIS DOWLING FIEDLER
FITZGERALD GREENBERG GREGORY
HARDWICK HAUSER HOOK HOWE
JARRELL JUNGER KAUFMANN KAZIN
KLONSKY LANGGASSER LOGAN
LOWELL McCARTHY MALRAUX
MARCUSE MILOSZ ORTEGA y GASSET
ORWELL PHILLIPS PRITCHETT
RAHV RANSOM REED ROETHKE
ROSENFELD SCHAFIRO SCHLESINGER
SCHWARTZ SHAPIRO SIMPSON SPENDER STAFFORD STEVENS SWEENEY
VAN GHENT WARSHOW WATKINS WISEMAN
L TRILLING D TRILLING TATE

THE NEW PARTISAN READER

1945 - 1953

edited by
William Phillips
and
Philip Rahv

A Companion Volume to
The Partisan Reader: 1934-44

"For twenty years Partisan Review has carried a large and important part of the intellectual traffic between America and Western Europe. It has always had the authority which is the reward of the positive and civilized mind. . . . This can be seen by anyone who looks at 'The New Partisan Reader.'"
—V. S. PRITCHETT,
New York Times Book Review

This 640-page anthology contains the best work published in Partisan Review since 1945, some of the finest writing of the modern period: 12 stories, major essays and shorter pieces by 40 writers, and a large section of poetry.

The New Partisan Reader is also available at the special price of $4.25 in combination with a two-year subscription.

Published by
Harcourt, Brace & Co.

The New Partisan Reader retail price $6.00
One year of PR regular price $4.00

SPECIAL COMBINATION OFFER both for $8.25

name .....

street .....

city ..... zone..... state.....

PARTISAN REVIEW, 513 Sixth Ave., New York 11

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOLLINGEN SERIES
1955

XXX PAPERS FROM THE ERANOS YEARBOOKS
Vol. 2: THE MYSTERIES
Translated by Ralph Manheim and R. F. C. Hull. Thirteen distinguished scholars discuss various religious manifestations that may be characterized as "mysteries." 6″ x 9″, 600 pages. *$5.00*

XXXIX THE ART OF INDIAN ASIA:
Its Mythology and Transformations
By Heinrich Zimmer. Completed and edited by Joseph Campbell. A comprehensive study of Indian art and its sources. With 662 photographs by Eliot Elisofon and others.
9″ x 12″, 450 pages of text. Two volumes, boxed. *$22.50*

XL EGYPTIAN RELIGIOUS TEXTS AND REPRESENTATIONS
Vol. 2: THE SHRINES OF TUT-ANKH-AMON
Translated with introductions by Alexandre Piankoff. Edited by N. Rambova. The first translation of the texts inscribed on the four gold-encrusted shrines that enclose the sarcophagus of Tut-Ankh-Amon.
9½″ x 12″, 160 pages, 62 plates, 3 color plates. *$17.50*

XLI CHAPMAN'S HOMER
Edited with introductions by Allardyce Nicoll. Two-volume edition of the George Chapman translations. Vol. 1: The Iliad. Vol. 2: The Odyssey and the Lesser Homerica.
6½″ x 9½″, 1600 pages, 2 vols., boxed. *$10.00*

XLVII THE GREAT MOTHER
By Erich Neumann. Translated by Ralph Manheim. An analysis of a primordial image which finds expression in early man's myth, ritual, and art, and in modern man's dreams, fantasies, and creative work. 8″ x 10″, 400 pages, 246 plates. *$7.50*

DISTRIBUTED BY PANTHEON BOOKS, INC., 333 SIXTH AVE., N. Y. 14
For detailed catalogue write to Bollingen Series, 140 E. 62 St., N. Y. 21

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gottfried Benn*

ARTISTS AND OLD AGE

Last winter in Berlin I went to a lecture at the Kant-Gesellschaft given by a Kant scholar on Kant's posthumous work. This work, the *Opus posthumum,* the original of which was lost in Northern Germany during the last war, exists in the form of transcripts which, with notes and commentary, were made available to the limited public of the philosophically interested about twenty years ago; it is apparent that Kant never got to the point of working it over and finishing it completely. The *Opus posthumum* was written during the years 1797-1803; Kant's great earlier works had been published some twenty years before that time. It has now become evident that some of his fundamental theses look very different in the light of the later work, which contains passages in contradiction to the *Critique of Pure Reason,* and the lecturer raised the question which propositions were to be considered valid, the earlier or the posthumous ones; for the two were scarcely reconcilable. The lecturer did not attempt to settle the question, but suggested that some of the earlier theses were cancelled out by some of the later. Behind this question of the comparative validity of Kant's earlier or later work, there looms up the problem of early and late works in general, the problem of the continuity of the creatively productive personality, of the transformations it undergoes and the breaks that occur. The particular case is that of a philosopher, but the problem is one that occurs in the case of artists too.

* Gottfried Benn, born in 1886, is one of the major poets of modern Germany. He occupies a position as an innovator and experimentalist in German literature comparable to that of Eliot and Pound in English. His verse, unfortunately, presents such great difficulties of translation that it is virtually unknown outside German-speaking countries.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was about the same time that I read in a newspaper a review of an exhibition of the work of Lorenzo Lotto that had been held in Venice the previous summer. In this review was the sentence: "The works of the last decades strike one as being unsure, in the same marked way as one notices it in the German artists Baldung and Cranach." So these great masters became unsure of themselves in their last period of creative productivity. While I was pondering on this, I came across the following dictum by Edward Burne-Jones in a work on the history of art: "Our first fifty years are squandered on committing great errors; then we grow timid and scarcely dare to set our right foot before the left any longer, so well are we aware of our own weakness. Then there follow twenty years of toil, and only now do we begin to understand what we are capable of and what we have to leave undone. And then there comes a ray of hope and a trumpet-call, and away we must go from the earth." Here then is the opposite of Lotto's case; here it is youth that is uncertain, and certainty comes with old age, when it is too late. This is reminiscent of the scene from "Titian's Death" by the twenty-year-old Hofmannsthal, where Titian lies on his death-bed, but still goes on painting—I think the picture was the *Danae*—and suddenly he starts up and asks for his earlier pictures to be brought before him.

He says that he must see them,
Those old, and wretched, pale ones,
must now compare them with the new ones he is painting;
for now, he says, things very hard to grasp are clear to him,
he understands, as earlier he never dreamt he could,
that up to now he was a feeble blunderer.

So here too we have it, seen through the artist's own eyes: only in his ninety-ninth year does he cease to be a feeble blunderer.

To my surprise, I found similar trends of thought in the East. Hokusai (1760-1849) says: "I have been mad about drawing since I was six years old. By the time I was fifty I had given the public a vast number of drawings, but nothing of what I did before my seventy-third year is worth mentioning. At about the age of seventy-three I had come to understand something of the true nature of animals, plants, fishes, and insects. It follows that by the age of eighty I shall have made further progress, by the age of ninety I shall see into

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the mystery of things, and if I live to be one hundred and ten everything I do, even if it is no more than a stroke or a dot, will be alive." Here we come up against the question that has occasionally been aired in literature—what would the world have thought of certain men had they died earlier than they did in fact? In this particular case it is the question what would have been left of Hokusai if he had died before his seventy-third year.

"All Eastern and all Western lands/Tranquil lie within His Hands"—so I took counsel with our Olympian great-grandfather Goethe and studied his *Maxims and Reflections*, a book that everyone who has his troubles should dip into for a few hours each week. There I found the following aphorisms:

1. Growing old means entering into a new business; all the circumstances change, and one must either entirely cease to act or take over the new role with purposefulness and deliberation.
2. When one is old one must do more than when one was young.
3. On the guillotine itself Madame Roland asked for writing materials in order to write down the quite special thoughts that had occurred to her on her last journey. What a pity it was denied her—for at the end of life there come to the resigned and courageous soul thoughts that were hitherto unthinkable, and they are like blissful spirits, settling radiantly on the peaks of the past.

Blissful spirits—on the way to the guillotine! Very Olympian, very gigantic!—and indeed this great-grandfather of ours, with his many talents and possessions of every kind, was quite the man to start upon a new business at any moment. All the same, this was scarcely of a generally illuminating nature. However, in the same volume there was the fragment *Pandora*, and I found myself considering the strange figure of Epimetheus:

> *"For Epimetheus I was called by my progenitors,*
> *he who muses on things past, and traces back,*
> *in the laborious play of thoughts, the quick deed*
> *to the dim realm of form-combining possibilities."*

To muse, to trace back, in the laborious play of thoughts, to the dim realm of form-combining possibilities—perhaps this Epimetheus was the patron of old age, a twilight figure, sombre, backward-glancing, in his hand the torch already lowered.

LICENSED TO UNI ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At this point you may perhaps say to yourself that you are listening to someone making extensive use of quotations, alert for whatever he can pick up, on the lookout for advice and information, like a young girl travelling alone, and you may ask yourself: What is he after, what is he getting at? Is there something personal hidden behind all this? Yes, indeed, that is precisely the case, there *is* something personal behind it all, but it does not take up undue space in what is to follow. All the same, just for a moment, if you please, imagine a writer with an unquiet past, unquiet times, who began his vocation together with a whole circle of others of the same age from all countries of the world, and who also underwent that same stylistic development which was known by various names—Futurism, Expressionism, Surrealism—and still keeps discussion alive today, since it is a stylistic development of decidedly revolutionary character—admittedly, and let us get this said once and for all—no more revolutionary, in our author's opinion, than such earlier stylistic developments as Impressionism, Baroque, or Mannerism—but still, for this century it certainly was revolutionary. This author sailed under various colors in his life: as a poet and as an essayist, as a citizen and as a soldier, as a hermit in the country and as a man of the world in this or that great metropolis—and for most of the time under criticism and attack. Well, now this writer is getting on in years, and he still goes on publishing things. And if he has not entirely quenched the volcanic element in himself, not entirely lost the dash and vigor of youth, what it comes to is that the critics nowadays exclaim: "Good heavens, why can't the man be quiet? Isn't it time he got down to writing something classical and preferably with something of a Christian tinge? Surely it's high time for him to ripen and mellow as befits his years!" But if for once he does write something rather more mellow and glowing and, so far as he has it in him, classical, the cry is: "Oh, the fellow's completely senile! He was moderately interesting when he was young, in his storm-and-stress period, but now he's a mere hanger-on desperately trying to keep up with himself. He hasn't anything to say so why can't he have the decency to shut up?"

So far, so good. When an individual book of a writer's is reviewed, whether it is panned or praised he can feel proud or annoyed, according to his mood. But the situation changes when the writer has got on so far in years that books begin to appear about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him, when the younger generation begins to write theses on him for their doctorates, at home and abroad, analyzing him, classifying him, cataloguing him—theses in which a comma that he put in thirty years ago, or a diphthong that he produced one Sunday afternoon after the first world war, is treated as a fundamental stylistic problem. The studies in themselves are interesting, the linguistic and stylistic analysis is superb, but for the writer under discussion it is like watching himself being vivisected. Others have seen what he is like, and so now he himself sees what he is like. For the first time in his life he recognizes himself; up to now he was utterly a stranger to himself, and he has had to grow old in order to see himself.

And supposing that this writer has at some time in his life uttered opinions that are later considered impossible, then good care is taken that these opinions should drag along behind him like the harrow after a farm-horse, and everyone is delighted to see them continually hitting him on the heels. Well, that's part of the game—the writer says to himself—nothing can be done about that. If one were to write nothing but what turned out to be opportune fifteen years later, presumably one would never write anything at all. One little example of what I mean, and then I shall leave this writer of ours for some time. In a conversation, a very serious conversation between three old men, this writer once wrote the sentence: "To be mistaken and yet be compelled to go on believing what one's own innermost being tells one—that is man and his glory begins yonder, beyond victory and defeat." From our author's point of view this declaration was a sort of anthropological elegy, a cyphered melancholy; but his critics thought differently. It shocked them to the core. Here they said was a blank check for every conceivable political crime. At first the author did not know what these critics meant, but then he said to himself: Oh well, in the nineteenth century the natural sciences made an onslaught on poetry, Nietzsche was fought by the theologians, today it is politics that gets mixed up with everything—all right, let's leave it at that—dim realm of form-combining possibilities. But all this together, the theoretical and the practical, caused our author to look into the question of how other old men had fared and what old age and the process of aging mean for the artist.

First of all, my inquiry is not concerned with the physiology of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aging. What medicine has to say on this subject doesn't amount to much. Its current formula is that aging is not a process of wear-and-tear but of adaptation, and I must say this doesn't convey much to me. It goes on, as I have discovered from its journals, to deplore the lack of unprejudiced, systematic psychological examination of old people who are not in psychiatric clinics. I don't know how many of you will also deplore this. Nor am I going to say anything about rejuvenation cures, or about the celebrated Bogomoletz serum either. What I am more concerned with is the question at what age aging actually begins.

The forty-six years after which Schiller died, the forty-six years after which Nietzsche fell silent forever, the forty-six years after which Shakespeare had done his work and retired for five years more of life as a private citizen, or the thirty-six years after which Hölderlin became insane—such, surely, is no great age. But mere arithmetic will of course get us nowhere. There can be very little doubt that foreknowledge of an early death compensates, in terms of inner life, for decades of physical life and the process of aging that goes with them. Such seems to have been the case with those who suffered from tuberculosis, for instance Schiller, Novalis, Jens Peter Jacobsen, Mozart, and so on. The early death of so many men of genius—something that the bourgeois-romantic ideology likes to connect with the notion of the consuming and devouring character of art—will have to be looked at a little more closely in each individual case. Some of these young men died of acute diseases. Schubert and Büchner died of typhus. Accident or war caused the deaths of Shelley, Byron, Franz Marc, Macke, Apollinaire, Heym, Lautréamont, Pushkin. Kleist, Schumann, and van Gogh committed suicide. In short, the ranks become thinner in relation to a direct causal connection between art and death. And looking at the dates when men of genius died, one makes a very odd observation of an entirely different kind, which I pass on to you not as the result of deep thought or as something of a metaphysical nature, but simply because it is interesting. It is this: it is astonishing, indeed quite amazing, how many old and even *very* old men one finds among the famous. Let us take as our basis the figures that Kretschmer and Lange-Eichbaum give for those who have been regarded as people of genius or of extraordinary gifts during the last four hundred years in the West; there are between a hundred and fifty and two hundred of them. Now it turns out that of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

these men and women of genius almost half have lived to be very old indeed. Our life-span is seventy years, so let us waste no time on that. Let us begin straight away with those who live more than seventy-five years. I think you will be as surprised as I was. Here now is a list, merely with the names and ages, beginning with painters and sculptors:

Titian ninety-nine, Michelangelo eighty-nine, Franz Hals eighty-six, Goya eighty-two, H. Thoma eighty-five, Liebermann eighty-eight, Munch eighty-one, Degas eighty-three, Bonnard eighty, Maillol eighty-three, James Ensor eighty-nine, Donatello eighty, Tintoretto seventy-six, Rodin seventy-seven, Käthe Kollwitz seventy-eight, Renoir seventy-eight, Menzel ninety, Matisse eighty-four.

Among poets and writers: Goethe eighty-three, Shaw ninety-four, Hamsun ninety-three; Maeterlinck eighty-seven, Tolstoy eighty-two, Voltaire eighty-four, H. Mann eighty, Ebner-Eschenbach eighty-six, Victor Hugo eighty-three, Tennyson eighty-three, Swift, Ibsen, Björnson and Rolland seventy-eight, Ricarda Huch eighty-three, Hauptmann eighty-four, Lagerlöf eighty-two, Gide eighty-two, d'Annunzio seventy-five, Spitteler, Fontane, and Freytag seventy-nine, Frenssen eighty-two, Isolde Kurz ninety-one, Claudel eighty-five, and among the living: Thomas Mann, Hesse, Rudolf Alexander Schröder, Alfred Döblin, and Hans Carossa over seventy-five.

There are, admittedly, fewer great composers. Let me mention Verdi eighty-eight, Richard Strauss eighty-five, Pfitzner eighty, Heinrich Schütz eighty-seven, Monteverdi seventy-six, Gluck and Handel seventy-four, Bruckner seventy-two, Palestrina seventy-one, Buxtehude and Wagner seventy, Georg Schumann eighty-one, Cherubini eighty-two, Reznicek eighty-five, Auber eighty-four; and among the living: Sibelius eighty-eight.

My list is by no means complete. I did not set about compiling it systematically, but only picked up whatever I happened to come across when I was looking into this matter in general. I am convinced the list could be extended further. If one wanted to explain this phenomenon, there are two points one could bring up. First of all, there is the sociological point that it is primarily those who live long who become great and famous, because they have a long time in which to produce their works. Secondly, there seems to be a quite reasonable biological explanation: regarded from one point of view art is, after

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all, a phenomenon of liberation and relaxation, a cathartic phenomenon, and such phenomena are closely associated with the physical organism itself. This assumption accords quite well with Speranski's theory, now finding its way into pathology, that both the state and the threat of illness are regulated and warded off by central impulses to a far higher extent than was hitherto supposed. There can scarcely be any doubt about it that art is a central and primary impulse. In saying this I don't want to make far-reaching assertions, but it does seem to me that such great age is particularly remarkable in view of the fact that so many of these people lived in times when the general expectancy of life was far lower than it is today. As you know, the expectation of life for new-born children has almost doubled since 1870.

Now the question what aging means for an artist is a complex one, in which subjective and objective elements cut across each other; on the one hand we have moods and crises, on the other history and description. Never again to be able to reach the height once attained, in spite of struggling for decades, is one fate. It was, for instance, Swinburne's; at the age of twenty-nine he was a sensation, and from then on he went on writing, ceaselessly, until when he died at the age of seventy-two he was a fertile, stimulating man, writing poetry. Something similar could be said of Hofmannsthal: the way from the poems written by the twenty-year-old Loris to the political confusions of *Der Turm* was the way from the feeding of the five thousand to the gathering up of the crumbs. It is the same again with George and Dehmel. All these men are lyrical poets in whom hard work and determination took the place of the intuitive glimmerings they had known in youth. Now I shall turn from these introspective allusions to an entirely concrete question on the objective side of our problem, namely: what do art history, literary history, and art criticism generally, mean by a "late" work? How do they define the formal transition from an artist's youthful work to the style of his "late" period?

It is difficult to get a straight answer to this question. Some critics resort to such terms as gentleness, serenity, toleration, a noble mellowness, liberation from the vanities of love and passion; others speak of weightlessness, a floating beyond the things of earthly life—and then they come out with the word "classical." Others again see the characteristic of the artist's old age as lying in ruthlessness, in a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

radical honesty—which makes one think of Shaw's dictum that old men are dangerous because they don't care about the future. Commenting on a painting by Franz Hals, Pinder introduces a new concept by saying that the style is recognizably that of an eighty-four-year-old painter, for only such a man could produce this petrified superabundance of experience and history, this conscious awareness of the proximity of death. Petrified—here now is a contradiction to "weightless" and "floating." Someone else writes of Dürer that he died too early, for one feels a downright need of a loosening of the formal power through the workings of a broad, gentle spirituality. At this point analysis of works of art becomes nothing less than wishful thinking, the desire to see a confirmation of the idea that broad, gentle spirituality is what constitutes a late style.

And now to take an example from literature, where the word "late" has become very fashionable—one is always reading articles about the late Rilke, the late Hofmannsthal, the late Eliot, or the late Gide. I am thinking now of a book by a well-known literary historian who specializes in the late Rilke. His book contains excellent, even profound observations, but the tendency is clearly as follows: phase 1: the phase of experiment, effort, and beginnings, then phase 2: "fulfillment" and "the true form." It is only in phase 2 that Rilke really became "what in the beginning he believed he was but in fact was not." What then is "the true"? There is too much eschatology, too much ideology, too much old-fashioned evolutionary theory, behind this term for my liking. Our friend the literary historian insists on seeing Rilke striving towards an ideal state, that is, his own, the literary historian's, ideal; but this seems to me particularly inappropriate in the case of Rilke, from whose early phase we have poems of such perfect beauty that no "true" anything can outshine them. I sometimes think that the urge to be found among the learned to see and represent the artist in "phases" must be one that is specifically German-idealist.

One of the most important books on our subject is Brinckmann's *Spätwerke grosser Meister*. Brinckmann tries to define the structural changes in creative minds by the aid of his antithesis between relation and fusion. These two concepts are the grappling-irons he uses in dealing with the problem. Relation, which is the first phase, means seeing and representing the relations between people, actions, ob-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

jects in space, and colors. Fusion, the later phase, is that in which the colors fuse into one ground-tone and the elements that were previously treated individually and contrastingly are subordinated to the structural totality, often becoming elusive and intangible—and now Brinckmann speaks of "the abandonment of a state of tension in favor of a higher freedom." Wherever the word "freedom" crops up it all becomes obscure, and at this point I have difficulty in following him. However, Brinckmann has made an extremely fascinating analysis of several painters who painted a subject first in their youth and then again in old age. He places the periods of change in the structure of productivity in the thirty-fifth and sixtieth years, and in this claims to be following Freud. Brinckmann is, furthermore, the only writer who, still following Freud, touches on the relationship between sexuality and artistic productivity. Although this problem is at this moment and at this point rather a digression, I should like to mention it. Such a relationship does undoubtedly exist, although it is extremely obscure. Everyone knows there are a great many artists of the first rank who are homoerotic and in whose work this divergence from normal sexuality does not become apparent. Take four of the greatest minds in all Western culture, say Plato, Michelangelo, Shakespeare and Goethe: two were notoriously homosexual, one may have been, and only Goethe seems to have been free from abnormality. And then on the other hand there is the asexual type of genius: you may remember Adolf Menzel's celebrated testament, from which it appears that in all his ninety years of life he never once had intercourse with a woman. We still know nothing about the link between the lessening of the sexual urge and the falling off of creativeness. We all know that at the age of seventy-five Goethe fell in love with Ulrike and wanted to marry her. Or there is the almost grotesque situation that Gide describes in his journals: in Tunis, at the age of seventy-two, he fell in love with a fifteen-year-old Arab boy, and he describes the rapturous nights that reminded him of the fairest years of his youth. There is something positively embarrassing about his enraptured confession that when he first saw the boy, who was a servant in his hotel, he was so overcome by his exquisiteness and shyness that he did not dare to speak to him. Gide at seventy-two in a Gretchen situation! The problem is interesting, but there is as yet no way of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

deciding whether the fading of the sexual urge paralyzes the mind or, as others contend, lends it wings.

A special case, and one that I was continually coming across in these investigations, is that of Michelangelo's Rondanini *Pietà,* which he produced at the age of eighty-nine, but did not finish. Eminent art historians hold such conflicting views about this *Pietà* that one is forced to assume that here is a case of decisive structural change in the artist. One art historian writes of the work's sublime inwardness and spirituality. Another says it radiates a deep emotion that cannot be gainsaid, something spiritualized and ethereal, a sort of floating upwards in which a last sigh mingles with the first faint glimpses of redemption. The other school of thought asserts that in this work of his old age Michelangelo turned his back on all that had constituted the fame of his youth. Simmel goes so far as to say: "In this work Michelangelo disowned the vital principle of his art; it is a betrayal, a tragedy, the final proof of his inability to reach salvation by the road of artistic creation, which is centered in the vision of the senses. It is the ultimate tragic failure." Here, it seems, we have a case in which a great man abandoned his former methods and techniques of controlling his mode of experience, unable to make any further use of them, presumably because they had come to seem obsolete and conventional, and who nevertheless had no new mode of expression for his new mode of experience, and so gave up, let his hands sink. Perhaps this is an example of what Malraux means in a deeply significant passage in his *Psychology of Art*: "First they invent their language, then they learn to speak it, often inventing another one as well. When they are touched by the style of death, they remember how in their youth they broke with their teachers, and now they break with their own work." And Malraux goes on: "The most complete embodiment of the artist is based equally on rejection of his masters and on the destruction of all that he once was." These are weighty words, and I should like to apply them to a man who carried a whole century upon his shoulders and whose fame is a meridian in our scheme of values.

In conclusion of this section I should like to speak of a book that confronted me with another question arising out of the subject. It is Riezler's book on Beethoven, the final chapter of which is called "The Last Style." The description of this last style is fascinating, con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vincing, and imbued with tremendous knowledge. But—I said to myself—first of all the writer of the book has to translate his musical impressions and analyses into language, expressing in words something that the music itself, by its very nature, does not contain. These words, which are intended to embody the essence of Beethoven's last style, are notably "authority," "power," "monumentality," "gigantic," "tectonic solidity," and, on the other hand, "weightless," "floating," "ethereal," "ultimate spirituality"—i.e., all words belonging to the emotive vocabulary we found in descriptions of the late works of painters and which we should presumably also come across now and then in descriptions of great works by younger men. Riezler begins this last chapter of his with the assertion that it is possible to find general terms for the description of a characteristic late style in all the arts throughout all periods, since "the modes of expression used in the various arts are all subordinate to the supreme fact of the 'universal artistic principle.' " And what is this universal artistic principle, this final hieroglyph? Would it not be just as easy to say that quite apart from music, painting, and poetry there is a linguistic medium that serves the purposes of criticism, providing the learned with the terminology they need in order to set up their systems?

But now another question—what is it like for the artist himself to grow old, to be old? How does he experience it himself? Take Flaubert—there in his house on the high ground, in Rouen, not leaving his room for days on end, and night after night the light from his windows shining out on to the river, so that the Seine boatmen take their bearings from it. He is not old, he is only fifty-nine, but he is worn out, he has bags under his eyes and his eyelids are wrinkled with bitter scorn—scorn of the *gent épicière*, those shopkeepers, the middle classes—to be sure, the court did not pronounce *Madame Bovary* immoral, but it did recommend him to exercise his gifts of observation on nicer people, people with more goodness of heart. And did that make him write about goodness of heart? When his *Education sentimentale* was published, they wrote: A cretin, a pimp, one who dirties the water in the gutter where he washes.

In his youth he wrote that anyone who wanted to create something permanent must take care not to laugh at fame. But how was it later on? Was there anything he did not laugh at? And most of all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it was himself he laughed at; he could not look at himself in the mirror while shaving without bursting into laughter. And now he was drawing up a list of the follies of those of the dead whose names constitute what we call humanity. Should he put on yet another record? Sit yet again in the *bistro* down-town, tense with concentration visually and acoustically, in order to penetrate into the object, to slip behind those faces? Should he once again make that superhuman effort of observation, an effort so tragic in every instant, picking up expressions, collecting phrases, things one could take one's stand on? —For there they all sit in the bar, all after money, all after love, while what he is after is *expression*, a sequence of sentences, and these two worlds must embrace. Put on another record? Realism, Artism, Psychologism—they say I am cold—well, coldness is not such a bad thing, I'd rather be cold than go in for singing and interpreting—for whom? For what? So do you believe in anything, Flaubert? Come on, say yes or no. Yes, I do believe, for after all believing only means being made in a particular way so that you can accept this and that. No, I don't believe, *je suis mystique et je ne crois à rien.*

Such was Flaubert when he was old.

And there's Leonardo in the little chateau of Ducloux on the Loire, when Italy was no longer a place for him, all his patrons dead or imprisoned. What does he think of in those evenings? The king is out hunting, and all is still, there is nothing to be heard but the metallic clang of the clock on the tower called Harloge and the cry of the wild swans on the water. By the river there are poplars like those in Lombardy long ago. The king has offered him four thousand guilders for the *Gioconda,* but he cannot bring himself to part with her. The king goes on insisting, and the old man throws himself at the king's feet, weeping, making himself a laughing-stock before the guests, offering the king his latest picture, a *St. John the Baptist,* but not the *Gioconda,* not that, that picture is his life. Five long years he worked at it, five years he bent over it, silent, growing old, not letting anyone see it. In the room where he painted it there were fragments of Greek statues, dog-headed Egyptian gods in black granite, Gnostic gems with magical inscriptions, Byzantine parchments hard as ivory, lost, clay potsherds bearing Assyrian cuneiform script, Persian magical writings bound in iron, papyri from Memphis, transparent and delicate as the petals of flowers. . . . He had had to transform himself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into all that, to lose himself in it, perhaps even to succumb to it. And in this way he lived for five years, dedicated to his inner vision, his one vision. The king and the court thought him a poor fool, but still, he had managed to keep the picture in his room. The spiral staircase up to his bedroom was narrow and steep, and as he climbed it he suffered attacks of dizziness and breathlessness. Then his right side became paralyzed and though he could still draw with his left hand, he could not paint. Then he spent the evenings with a monk, playing games with little blocks of wood, or cards. Then his left side became paralyzed too. And he had just managed to say "Arise and cast yourself into the sea" when he died and lay there, at rest, like a weight that has fallen. After his death a Russian ikon-painter who lived nearby came and stood before his easel and exclaimed: "What unheard-of shamelessness! Can this debauched fellow who is naked like a whore, and beardless, be the forerunner of Christ? Diabolical sight, away, sully not my eyes!"

Such was Leonardo da Vinci when he was old.

Evenings of life—oh, these evenings of life! Most of them are spent in poverty, coughing, crook-backed—drug-addicts, drunkards, some even as criminals, almost all unmarried, almost all childless—the whole bio-negative Olympic assembly, a European, cis-Atlantic team of Olympians that has borne the glory and the sadness of post-Classical man for four hundred years. Those born under a lucky star managed perhaps to get themselves a house, as Goethe and Rubens did, and those whose lot was meagre went on painting to the end of their days without a penny in their pockets, painting their wavy olives, and those who live in the age of the conquest of space look out of a back-room window on a rabbit-hutch and two hortensias. Making a survey of them all, one can discover only one thing —they were all under some compelling urge that they could not escape from. "If I don't tremble as the adder does in the snake-tamer's hand, I am cold. Anything I ever did that was any good at all was done in that condition," Delacroix said. And Beckmann wrote: "I would gladly live in sewers and crawl through all the gutters of the world if that were the only way I could go on painting." Adders, gutters, sewers—that is the overture to life's evening.

I am not wallowing in the macabre for its own sake, nor amusing myself with an obsolete picture of things dating from the days of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the *poètes maudits*. These psychopathological and sociological studies of the lives of men of genius, and of their last days, are none of my making; they are the work of others. The trend of thought may seem a little disconcerting nowadays, when the artist has acquired some of the outer trappings of the solid, respectable citizen and adopts the airs of a functionary; and indeed he feels that he *is* a functionary, in a definite position, which forces him to seek government commissions and external security. Routine criticism, the reviewing of exhibitions and books commissioned and paid for by newspapers and publishers, has dragged the artist into public life, into the general hotchpotch in which individualism is coming to an end in our epoch. But let there be no mistake about it: he who is under that compelling urge remains inwardly untouched. In a helicopter painted arsenic-green he goes on climbing back into his esoteric studio. It is only a short while since the eighty-three-year-old Degas said: "A picture is something that needs just as much smartness and viciousness as crime does—forgery with a dash of Nature thrown in."

Perhaps the image of the arsenic-green helicopter is a trifle banal. All the same, let us get into that helicopter for a moment so that we can look down on what we can't take with us of mankind and the earth.

It is not an ascent that is made with very much love for humanity. Think for instance of that self-portrait of Tintoretto's, a late work (I don't remember where it hangs, I only know it from reproductions)—there's a thing one can't forget, and there is only one word for it: rancid. Or think of Rembrandt's last self-portraits—reserved, wary, and as though they were saying: Count me out. None of the great *old* men was an idealist. They got along without realism. What they could do and what they wanted was the things that are possible. It is only dilettantes who dream of the impossible.

Art—these men say—art *must* put into the picture the relationship there is between the world and the absolute. Art must restore the center, but without losing in depth. Art must represent man as being made in the image of God—and is there anything at all that is not made in the image of God?—for if there is I haven't heard of it—and I don't exclude even the tiger. And what it comes to finally is that there is no "must" where art is concerned. There's a radio in this helicopter of ours, and right now it's playing a hit from the film

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Moulin Rouge. It makes me shiver with excitement. For a first-rate dance-tune sometimes has more of the century in it than a motet, and a word may weigh heavier than a victory.

Ah, these old men! What I see is not so much something lofty but simply the century and the compulsion. A rose-pink century—right, then, let's paint pastoral idylls, and above all let us stick to the center. But supposing it's a black century—what do we paint then? Something technical perhaps, in keeping with our habit of holding conferences? After all, it's technical things that people sit round talking about; "technology" and "integration" are the watchwords. Everything must be in keeping with everything else: poetry with the Geiger-counter, inoculation-serums with the Church Fathers, and so on, and don't leave anything out or global coalitionism is endangered. Language must be assimilated to the technical too—though I must say this is an idea I should never have had on my own. The only sort of language that bears, that grows, that works, is the language that lives on its own resources, spontaneously procreating, absorbing, but integrating according to its own immanent law, the few expressions it takes over from physics and the automobile industry. These few miserable splinters it absorbs into its body, and the place heals over; the transcendence of language is never disturbed.

Up and up we go in our helicopter—earth dwindles away, but we can still make out those colossal complexes, those collectives, those things called institutes and institutions. "I made my way through them too," one of the old men might say nowadays. "I suffered from depressions, I entered an institution and went to a psychoanalyst. And he said: 'You are suffering from oral-narcissistic deficiency, you lack an adequate intake of external objects. You are introverted—I suppose you know what I mean by that!' I replied that introverted and extroverted seemed pretty crude basic concepts to me. There are those who bear a hereditary burden and those who bear none. There are those who are fettered and those who are free. And the first are the more interesting. 'Contactual insufficiency,' the therapist said, pressing into my hand a booklet entitled: *You and the Libido,* and thereupon fell into a trance.

"Then I heard," one of those old masters would say today, "that thought makes you free, thought makes you happy. And so I entered another institution and went to the thinkers. But sociology, phenom-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

enology, and the theory of types—it all sounds just like Puccini. Ontology—where, I ask you, is there any existence of anything outside my pictures? And what is all this stuff about things, anyway? Things come into existence because one admits their existence, that's to say, one formulates them, paints them. If one doesn't grant them their existence, they vanish into the realm of unreality and insubstantiality. These thinkers with their grounds of existence that no one can see, which is utterly formless—all these contributions and contributors—they turn on the faucet and what comes out is generally a spurt of Plato. Then they take a quick shower, and then the next one steps into the tub. None of them ever finishes anything. *I* have to finish *my* things! They're all idealists, and they think the whole thing only starts with them. They're all optimists, and at the age of seventy-five they go and have a new jacket made to measure. Schopenhauer was a well-off man, I believe, independent, and did some real thinking all the same—his thought was interesting, it was sublime, it was far-reaching. But none of these gentry nowadays really *thinks*—unless one excepts Wittgenstein, who said: 'The limits of language are the limits of my world,' and 'What the picture represents is what it means.' There's sound thinking, there's concrete thinking! No loose ends there! There is a systematic self-limitation to the thinking of propositions. That is painterly thinking, that is Lethe, and there myth comes to an end."

And so what is the situation like? Desperate? Send me up some fresh supplies of libido and a guaranteed pre-Spenglerian civilization. The exploration of outer space hasn't yet reached the stage where we could start to feel something again at the sight of the stars. Oh, why didn't I become a landscape-painter, professionally busy dashing from the Teutoburger Wald to Astrachan, and all by aid of the Volkswagen that we have these days? Then I could have some springy woodland earth underfoot!

"How queer the nations are," our old man goes on thinking. "They want interesting minds, but they also want to be the ones who decide what the interesting minds are to be interesting about. They want internationally famous names, but anyone who writes a word against their pet ideas is instantly crossed off the list. They want to be delivered of works of universal significance, but it is they who organize the midwives and provide them with textbooks on confine-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment. Kleist's *Penthesilea* would never have been written if a vote had been taken on it first. Strindberg, Nietzsche, El Greco would never have appeared on the scene. But conformism would have existed all right! It has always been there, only *it* would never have created the four hundred years of western civilization." Surely there's no writer who hasn't often envied painters: they can paint oranges and asphodels, pitchers, even lobsters and other crustaceans, and nobody reproaches them with not having got in anything about the housing problem. But obviously the trade unions have their rights in the case of anything written. Anti-social is the word. "Art *must*. . . ." It's probably a waste of time pointing out that Flaubert gave us a description of the artist's predicament, of his inability to express all he feels and yearns for, and how he can only express what it is given to him to express within the limitations of word and form.

Only one kilometer more and we shall have reached the ceiling. The traveler glances down. When the diamond-dealer Salomon Rossbach jumped off the Empire State Building he left a mysterious message: "No more above, no more below, and so I leap off." A good message, the traveler says: no more above, no more below, the center is damaged, the compass-needle and the quarters of heaven are no longer valid, but the species is rampant and keeps going by means of pills. The body has grown more morbid, with modern medicine positively offering it thousands of diseases, and they break out of it with scientific vigor—oh, no slur on the doctors, a very fine lot of men, I only mean that in the old days if you were bitten by a mosquito you scratched the place, but today they can prescribe a dozen different ointments and not one of them helps—still, that's life, it keeps things moving. Our bodies are more morbid than they used to be, but they live longer.

The brain lives longer, but where there was once power of resistance there are now empty places developing—or can you, down there on the earth, look out of your window and still imagine a God in it all, a God who created anything as gentle as plants and trees? Rats, plague, noise, desperation—yes—but flowers? There is a fourteenth-century picture called *The Creation of the Plants,* with a small, crooked, black-bearded figure of God standing there, his right hand, which is much too big for the rest of him, raised as though he were pulling the two trees out of the ground, and there they are beside

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him—apart from them the whole place is still pretty empty. Can you imagine that kindly Creator today? Vice, worms, maggots, sloths and skunks—that yes, masses of it, ever new installments of it, fresh deliveries every day, 100% genuine, continual new editions—but an affectionate little God who pulls two trees out of the ground? No trees, no flowers—but electronic brains, artificial insemination for cows and women, chicken farms with music laid on to increase productivity, artificial doubling of the chromosomes bringing about giant hybrids, deep freezing, overheating—you've sown a seed, have you? Well, jump, quick! Else the shoot will get you in the leg!

Well, so here we are. The old man enters his studio—a bare room, a big table covered with slips of paper and sheets of notes. He goes up to it, saying to himself: 'Now what shall I do with this?—essay, poem, dialogue? The notion that the form is born together with the content is just another illusion hatched by philosophies of art—I can use this here or there, coloring, weaving, fixing it up, all just as I feel like it, I went through my beginning and I am going through my end, *moira*, my allotted part. Only one thing is certain: When a thing's finished it must be complete, perfect. Though of course there's the question: And what then?'

Take another look at the most famous 'late' works—what are they like? For instance, there's Goethe's *Novelle*—a menagerie catches fire, the booth burns down, the tigers escape, the lions are loose! And it all works out harmoniously. No, this earth is scorched and bare, flayed by lightning, and today the tigers bite. Or what about the second part of *Faust*? Undoubtedly this is Germany's most mysterious gift to the world. But all those choruses, gryphons, lamias, pulcinellos, ants, cranes, and empusae, the whole thing humming and buzzing away, singing to itself, away off to where the fairy rings are and the crowns of stars and the angelic boys—where does it all come from anyway? Let's face it, the whole thing hovers in the realm of pure imagination, it's all table-rapping, telepathy, hocus-pocus. There's someone standing on a balcony, unreal, motionless, blowing bubbles—some bright, some dark—conjuring forth more and more clay pipes and straws to blow his iridescent bubbles with—oh, a magnificent God on the Balcony, inoculated with the spirit of the Classical and the Baroque, with miracles and mysteries dangling from his coat tails.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But in our day the eye is slightly moist when one looks that way, and that's all there is to it. That's how it stands with such works nowadays.

Around the greatest of all the translators and interpreters keep on circling for a few centuries, but soon there is no one left who understands their language. What then? Primitives, the Archaic, the Classical, the Mannerists, the Abstractionists, in a word, the Quaternary Period. But what then? Spaces that are much too big have been opened up to us, and too many spheres, and feelings too weighty—perhaps the making of art is, after all, a rather shallow reaction? Isn't it perhaps *profounder* simply to suffer the human substance in silence? What was it the Lord Jehovah put into our essential nature, what was the fate he gave us? Was creative salvation to be our lot, or were we meant to go for the still point, to sit under the Bo-tree, immobile, waiting to meet Kama-Mara, the god of love and death? How many hours of my life I have spent pondering on a certain saying of the Balcony God's, turning it this way and that—the saying that: "On its highest peak poetry seems to be completely external. The more it withdraws inwards, the further it sinks." What does that mean? Am I supposed to disown my inner being, cheat it, make a fool of it—is *that* the precondition for poetry? And what else is it? A conjuror's act, the rope-trick, mere nothingness with a glaze over it? And from the East I hear them harping on the same tune. The Master Kung Dsi, speaking of painters, says: "He is crude in whose work the meaning has more weight than the line." In other words, for him too the higher thing is the manipulated thing, the manufactured thing, style. On the other hand, there's Guardini saying that "behind every work of art, as it were, something opens up. . . ." Well, and what is it that as it were opens up? After all, we are supposed to cover it up with paint and hide it. Or what of a great philosopher's dictum that "art is the self-manifestation and operation of truth"? What truth, anyway? A truth made up of sketches and designs, a manufactured truth? Or is truth only mentioned in order to let philosophy make a showing, for of course art isn't concerned with truth at all, only with expression. And then finally we come to the question: What is this expression that thrusts its way in in front of depth? Is expression the same as guilt? It might be.

Still, I dare say I'm too old to unravel these problems. Mists of weariness and melancholy cloud my mind. I can remember having

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heard Pablo Sarasate playing his fiddle and Caruso singing at the Metropolitan Opera House, with the Astors sitting in the diamond horseshoe. I have watched Bergmann operating, and I stood on parade before the last Emperor. I began studying by the light of an oil-lamp, with Haeckel's *Riddles of the Universe* for my forbidden reading. I have ridden and I have flown, but I have also seen the great sailing-ships upon the seas that no man had ever yet flown across—but that's all past and gone—all over now. And today I say it was all much more heavily charged than one thought at the time; everything was much more predestined than it seemed. And the oddest thing of all is that one was much more *in the air* then than one dreamed, believing as one did in one's autonomy. To take just one example: there were painters who spent their whole life painting in tones of silver or of yellow, and another one who always stuck to brown, and there was a generation that wrote poetry mainly in nouns. It wasn't a literary caprice, it was in the air—in the air of entirely heterogeneous dimensions. A short time ago I read the following story about Clemenceau. He had just engaged a new private secretary and on the first day he was showing him what the job consisted of. "Some letters," Clemenceau said, "you will have to draft by yourself. Now listen: a sentence consists of a noun and a verb. If you want to use an adjective, come and ask me first." Come and ask me first! It's exactly the same advice that Carl Sternheim gave me when we were both young. "When you've written something," he said to me, "go through it again and cross out the adjectives. Your meaning will be much clearer then." It turned out to be true. Indeed, the leaving out of explanatory, padding-out adjectives became a sort of compulsion-neurosis with my generation.

My generation! But of course the next one is here by now, the young people, the youth of our time! God preserve their imitative urge for them, and then it wouldn't be long before the whole thing stops of its own accord. But supposing they were to produce a new style—*evoe*! A new style is a new type of man. Now, though genetics haven't produced very much that is clear, one thing seems to be certain: a new generation means a new sort of brain, and a new sort of brain means a new sort of reality and new neuroses, and the whole thing is called evolution, and that's the way civilization goes on spreading. If I were to give this younger generation of ours some ad-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vice, talking down to them from my pulpit of old age, it would be this: "When you have published four of those rhymed or unrhymed things that are called poems, or have drawn a goat more or less true to nature, don't expect that from now on every time you have a birthday the Mayor of your town will call to wish you many happy returns. After all, it's only human handiwork you're doing. You would do well to think occasionally of how when Schubert was twenty-nine someone advised him to buy unlined paper and draw the lines himself, since that was cheaper. What impudence! everyone says nowadays when they hear of it, but of course the same thing keeps on happening all over again, and it isn't everyone who by the age of thirty-one has reached a stage where he doesn't need to spend money any more."

Gentlemen of the rising generation, allow me to be provoking. I do it in the hope of making you tough. Toughness is the greatest blessing an artist can have—the ability to be hard on himself and on his work. Or as Thomas Mann has said: "It is better to ruin a work of art and make it useless for giving to the world than not to go all out at every point." Or as I tried to put it a moment ago: One thing is certain, when a thing is finished it must be complete, perfect. And in this connection don't for a moment forget the questionable and devious nature of your undertaking, the dangers and the hatred that surround your activities. Don't lose sight of the cold and egotistical element in your mission. Your art has deserted the temples and the sacrificial vessels, it has ceased to have anything to do with the painting of pillars, and the painting of chapels is no longer anything for you either. You are using your own skin for wallpaper, and nothing can save you. Don't let yourself be tempted by "security"—312 pages, cloth-bound, price 13 marks 80. There is no turning the clock back. The things of the mind are irreversible; they go right along their road to the end, right to the end of the night. With your back to the wall, care-worn and weary, in the gray light of the void, read Job and Jeremiah and keep going. Formulate your principles without regard for anything else, because there will be nothing left of you but your words when this epoch comes to an end, making an end of all singing and chanting of poetry. What you don't say will not be there then. You will make enemies, you will be alone, a tiny boat on the vast ocean, a tiny boat in which there are dubious clatterings and clank-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ings going on and a shivering that comes from your own dismay at your undertaking. But don't send out an SOS. First of all, there's no one to hear you, and secondly, after so many voyages your end will be a quiet one.

Ladies and gentlemen, the portrait of old age is finished. We have left the studio. The helicopter is about to land. Out of the cabin there steps an *homme du monde,* wearing a gray tie and a black homburg, who disappears in the hustle and bustle of the airfield. The airfield is out in the country, and this gentleman strolls up to the edge of it, where he sees poplars like those on the banks of the Loire and like those long ago in Lombardy, and sees the river a ribbon winding away into the distance like the Seine, where once the bargemen looked out for that lighted window in the dark. The same things recur for as long as there is sameness. And when some day nothing is like anything else any more at all and the great rules change—even then some kind of order will persist.

"To be mistaken and yet be compelled to go on believing what one's own innermost being tells one—that is man, and his glory begins yonder, beyond victory and defeat. . . ." Yes, he would write that same sentence yet once again, if he had to start all over again, even if it were misleading, even if it were a falsification. After all, what dictum is blameless? Face to face with the western world, I did my work; I lived as if the day had come—my own day. I was the man that I shall be. And so at the end I take my stand on all the Church Fathers, all those ancient men with centuries behind them: *non confundar in aeternum*—I too shall not be condemned eternally.

(*Translated from the German by Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alwyn Lee

SOMETHING FOR BRADSHAW'S TOMBSTONE

An Episode in the Life of an Official

Despite a gross picturesqueness and the presence of a sixteenth-century fort, no tourists and few strangers come to the town of San Rafael, on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Indians come in from the malarial hinterlands to stand blackly among their mangoes and pottery in the markets or to totter about the *pulquerías*. A few fishermen bring their boats in from the Gulf round under the lea of the harbor mole to spill creels of brightly colored fish on the broken stone wharves.

For the most part San Rafael, a square mile or so of sweating stone and mildewed stucco, lies abandoned under the gulls and vultures to the final encroachment of sea or jungle. At the hour of the siesta San Rafael seems at its most vulnerable—least able to resist time's final judgment; its squares and long arcades swept bare of living things like those gaunt surrealist perspectives designed to haunt the mind with an inhuman emptiness. On pediment and roof ridge the very vultures are still, their rattling metallic plumage furled.

Clumps of sleepers, felled by the diurnal vertigo, lie in the blue shadows of walls, their blankets stippled and spotted by the cadmium sun as it blazes through palmfrond and grillwork.

Through this scene, like Dante among the dead, one brisk anomalous figure passed one day this year. Laurel-like trees, dense and ancient, held the sun from panama and seersucker as it flapped—buckskin on stone, briefcase on trouserleg—across the silent square.

Skinner Bradshaw, like one magically immune from a total plague, displayed his energy to the insentient town; and, like such survivors, was touched by feelings of guilt and superiority. Such mixed, but highly creditable feelings were habitual with him; almost, with a Bradshaw of New England, a heritage. Commitment, responsi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bility, integrity, a job well done, or as his ancestors would have put it, grace through works—these might justify the otherwise inadmissible feeling of superiority to the sloth-stunned townspeople. The guilt —the guilt of *being* superior—needed a subtler exorcism. "The siesta," he had told himself, "is a nutritional phenomenon rather than a regional institution"; and he had incorporated this remarkable phrase in the report he was engaged in composing. For Bradshaw, this report had been a talisman against the odious reality of San Rafael ever since, like a visitation from another planet, a small charter plane had set him down, shaken and airsick, on the tussocky landing field. The report flapped against his leg like a scabbard—heavy with portent; its neatly typed eloquence encompassed, in its historical sections, the operatic past of the place (piracy and massacre) and moved through the hopeless immobile present, the lamentable economy (ruined sugar and banana plantations), health (a statistical scandal), housing (too much and too early), people (the touchy and malarial Latin-Indians) into the future where, under the guidance of experts in soil, sanitation and government, a decent way of life could be engineered out of the ruins.

Thus Bradshaw, a responsible and imaginative official, moved as an evangel through the alien town. Yet a colonial Englishman of his class and generation would have seemed less exotic here than this young American; a touch of raffishness, of self-deprecating bohemianism expressed in length of hair, age of garment or negligent dentistry might have been expected among even the higher echelons of the once-Empire; there would have been some implied kinship with this region of ruined tragedians. Bradshaw wore an air of spruce innocence—as out of place here as an accountant on the stage of Carmen. The young clothes suggested with narrow lapel and tightish trousering a stripling outgrowing his last year's suit, and the *en brosse* hair (which suggested however to the local barbers not "crew" but a German or a recent inmate of the *peni*) added a touch of the absurd and anomalous as if this crypto-sahib were hiding his serious intentions behind a false age. All this expressed a confidence which his British "opposite number" (had there been one) would not have had; Bradshaw was a believer, from a race of faith.

Passing through the square, Bradshaw renewed within himself the vision he had been accorded so many weeks ago at the beginning

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of his mission. He had been seen off at Washington airport by the Point IV expert, the Rockefeller Man and the Old Hand of the Latin American Desk at "State." "We want the whole picture . . . remember, anything we can do . . ." they had said. "This is the rugged one," said the veteran. "It could be the green light for the whole program. Remember, if you pull it off, it will be something you can carve on your tombstone." Thus admonished and encouraged, Bradshaw had embarked on what his wife, a well-educated Smith girl, now involved in the rites of a painless birth regime, had pleased him by describing as "terribly exciting." Technical experts had been in the field before him; it was to be his task to unify their reports into a persuasive document tentatively called "A New Frontier for Democracy" and designed to put critics at a moral disadvantage. This material lay on his lap as the plane hammered through the fields of cloud that marched with the Gulf Stream. Far below on the timeless main, the high-buttocked carricks put into the wind, hung like ruffling swans . . . roundshot through the rigging . . . the silkshod foot on the bloodied oak . . . the proffered sword, and, in the odorous holds, loot of the palace-temples of the priest-kings. . . . So Bradshaw's mind, which gave nervous hospitality to an under-privileged poet, had addressed itself to the historical "background." He had been reading:

San Rafael was founded in 1606 by the English pirate Amyas Penton, self-styled "Admiral," as a base for his freebooting operations in the Caribbean. Here, he careened the vessels of his "navy" and maintained a garrison whose ruffianly personnel exacted tribute from the countryside. . . .

These were Bradshaw's "ruffianly" precursors and sternly he rehearsed in his mind the sober judgments which would make a mature picture of this storybook history: "Nascent mercantile economy imposed itself on the primitive theocratic feudalism of the region. . . ."

Penton caused to be demolished a pyramid sacred to the indigenous population to provide stone for the construction of a breakwater and massive fortifications. . . .

Well, Bradshaw had thought, he too would be obliged to "cause to be demolished" a road block or two before the future could take shape. Godlike above the fat clouds he had been given a moment

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in which the loose floating threads of his life had been gathered into a meaningful pattern. A modest, worrying man, given to self-questioning as if his own existence were contingent upon the outcome of a debate, Bradshaw felt that at last he had received from life an important vote of confidence. The thing, he told himself, made a whole slew of sense.

Bradshaw was a child of the '30s; for him that drab time was hazed over with the quality of his own generous, uncalculating youth; then had come, like an unseasonable frost, the Cold War and McCarthyism and the conviction of Alger Hiss; now here at last was this belated commission, a thing to test his wilting idealism—the rehabilitation of a rotted province by the power of an idea.

The batwing doors of the El Polar flapped behind him. The barman slept with his head on the zinc; otherwise the place was empty—a blue cave filled with murals of visionary icebergs and what were perhaps intended to represent Eskimos and Arctic fauna. Senor Orquienz was late again.

Bradshaw fumbled out some Kleenex and mopped first his pale glistening face, then the stained oilcloth of a table near the window. He was scrupulous not to give offense by such hygienic rites and he glanced guiltily at the barman, but the Indian's black head lay insensible. Insensible too was Bradshaw to the operatic charm of the scene framed by the window; he saw instead history made visible in a crude charade. There, under the unwinking sky was the square with its church, San Rafael and All the Angels—a theater for outmoded forces, grotesque, over-decorated, a standing affront, he would have thought, in its opulent gildings to the centuries-old misery of its worshippers. Across its façade sprawled a riotous jungle of carved stone, but fissured across this rosy expanse with a great crack caused by some earth temblor, plugged with a jagged white streak of lime mortar. There was none of the usual traffic of black-cowled women in and out; Bradshaw wondered if the priests took their siestas in the confessionals and was moved almost to pity for these Graham Greene characters (as he thought of them) cooking in their little black boxes like hams in a smokehouse. The square tilted sharply seaward so that the bay was visible over the roofs of tile and corrugated iron and between palisades of the Churrigueresque masonry so offensive to Bradshaw's puritan eye. Curling into the glittering

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

expanse was the harbor mole. A beached gunboat rusted in the shallows under "Admiral" Penton's round tower, and the mole itself, built at God knew what cost of forced labor was broken at the spine, but, unlike the church, it had not been repaired. For the harbor, so suitable for a pirate's nest, had proved inconvenient to the needs of the great fruit company whose ships had once loaded bananas from his port. Someone, Bradshaw reflected bitterly, some tough old shark sitting alone in a big room in New York, had shuffled through some papers, scrawled his name and condemned the place to death.

It was one of the things that fed his indignation—the indifference of the Rafaelanos to this obvious clue to their ruin. Indeed, the very morning of his arrival, as he checked into the Gran Hotel Penton, he had made conversation on this topic with the unshaven, collarless patron. Was there (knowing the answer) any plan or proposal to restore the harbor for commerce? The man, grossly fat, had answered with overt and deliberate insolence that perhaps the *Norteamericano* could provide the dollars. This with a slow, sly gesture—a fondling of the coat lapel. Thus baited, Bradshaw had answered in his Harvard-Berlitz Spanish that yes, there were stranger things in all the world than that he should do precisely that.

Bradshaw had sat in on a course with the Point IV people which had warned him of *"dignidad"*; he was annoyed that in his first encounter with these people he should have stumbled so easily into so crude a psychological pitfall. The course had been concerned with something called "culture shock" which was supposed to afflict officials stationed in "underdeveloped" regions; Bradshaw, however, had easily made his way through its simple tests and passed out officially accredited free of chauvinist taint and fit for service in the mission field, and with his record checked thus: "Attitudes: Mature. Responsible. Well-adjusted." It was thus with shame for his slight but unmistakable case of culture shock that Bradshaw walked out of the hotel into the blazing town.

Soon, Bradshaw's face took on what his wife liked to call "the Skinner look"—the mask of moral indignation from which his great ancestor Nathaniel Skinner had issued his awful sermons. For here, at every turn, lay the substance of his mission. Here, the noseless paretic; there the glaucoma in the eye, the mendicant crone, the brown conical breast on which flies crawled.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here, the Indians had conquered the conquistadores; mud-brick and maize-straw thatch was moving back over the squares of tile and carved stone. These dilapidated colonial houses had surely been the homes of madmen, Bradshaw had thought, with their tall walls blank to the street or with slit-eyed windows squinting suspiciously through heavy bars. And how deeply different from his own cool, elm-padded village—neat, candid, and untragic, innocent of hedge or wall. . . . But what kind of cruel zealots had lived in these twisted stone sepulchers, now deserted and choked with weed and vine or ill-smelling warrens where half a dozen families had squatted? The life had been more harshly judged by history than that which still flourished in the pine clapboards of the north. Once, glancing in through an arched gate, he saw a pig caged like an exotic zoo-animal in wire netting strung about the tiled octagon of what had been a fountain.

Only three or four houses had escaped the general dilapidation and decay; there evidently life of a kind went on its old way. There a *zaguán* still dozed inside the wrought-iron gates awaiting the visitors who never came or the family who never left except perhaps, once a day, women in black would go to the church—to scuttle like cockroaches across a band of sunlight between sink and garbage pail. Nor did his pale eye fail to observe the advertisements. *"Enfermedades De Mujeres: La Clínica del Dr. Gaona"* (syphilis?) *"El Paludismo"* (Rheumatism? Malaria?). These notices (of enameled iron for permanence) added to the impression of corruption—of a depthless lassitude of disease and malnutrition which Bradshaw received with horror yet eagerly. It seemed even to have thrown a physical discoloration as of rust over some of the people. For, as a tourist, Bradshaw would have felt the same pity before these scenes of sloth and ruin, but as a tourist, he would have been depressed and guilt-stricken; armed as he was with the powers of his mission, his pity became indignation and energy to feed his purpose.

His feelings focused upon one memorable scene. Before one gate he saw a woman being tormented by a rabble of street children. The gate was one of those yet unruined; upon it the mason had carved devilish pre-Columbian animal masks mixed with Christian symbols—stars, crosses, hearts and what not; beneath it and back from the street, almost in the mouth of a cool court sat a woman veiled in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

black, her face of a remarkable dead blue-white. For no single clear reason Bradshaw had the impression that the woman was mad. About her, but keeping well to the street, skipped and chanted a gaggle of children. Barefoot, ragged, some brown, some the color of red clay, they danced before this ageless and pitiful creature. Bradshaw saw that from the folds of her nun-like robe protruded a white claw in which she held a sweetmeat of chemical green. She seemed to beckon to appease her tormentors but, every now and then, the boys would push forward one of their number who would shriek and giggle in a pantomime of terror. It was an ugly thing, made memorable for Bradshaw by the fact that it had been the liveliest event in all his first day's reconnaissance of San Rafael. Only malice, it seemed, could animate these people. Furthermore, it was evidently no extemporized game but a ritual cruelty like a bullfight. And the song they had chanted! Bradshaw made out the words:

"Tía Dulces

"Siempre . . .?"

Auntie Candy, Bradshaw translated. Always. . . . Some obscenity probably. Whatever it was, it was time to break it up. "Scat," said Bradshaw, experimentally. "Shoo! *Vamonos niños!"* But the horrible children carried on with their game. However, his words had some effect. One of the boys turned and unwarily came within the radius of the madwoman's arm which darted out like a striking snake. There was a scuffle and a yelp of sincere pain from the ragged boy. The game was over, the children ran yelling down the street. *"Chingao!"* that invariable expletive. *"Chingao!"* they shouted back. Because there seemed nothing else to do, Bradshaw raised his panama. *"Buenas tardes,"* he said politely to the lady.

Such had been the events of his first day. That night, in a letter to his wife in Alexandria, Virginia, he had tried to order these happenings to his satisfaction. "D-Day plus 12 hours," he had dated the letter, for with his wife he cultivated such little facetiousnesses against which the essential solemnity of mind showed to greater effect. "It all made me wonder why I had ever hesitated to take on this job," he wrote. "Apart from the cruelty of it. All children, of course, are cruel. Remember little Hank and the Chambers boy's frog collection? . . . the appalling thing is that nobody sees anything wrong in it. Here it is perfectly O.K. to make fun of insane people. Medieval. . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Senor Orquienz was late, but Bradshaw took consolation in the papers on his table. Chief of these was a map of the isthmus impressively decorated with ideographs, demographic symbols and little squiggles representing new industries. For Bradshaw, the creator and familiar of this document, it was more palpable than the mirage of reality outside the cantina. In its terms he saw rectangles of glass and clean masonry in the jungles; the whole isthmus became a coherent enterprise, organized, useful and busy; imperceptibly the climate had changed for the better. A few planes with DDT would defeat the ruin of centuries. But soon the edges of his vision blurred. The siesta, that nutritional phenomenon, had stepped across the dietary lines and claimed the well-nourished Bradshaw.

The wall telephone set the flies rising in a cloud from the bar. Somewhat slower, the barman's head rose, and he moved like a man in deep water toward the noise. The croaking box took some time to make its meaning clear.

"El Norteamericano? El Señor Pratsore?"

Obediently, he peered about his cerulean cave as if the answer posed a problem of infinite discrimination. Amid this non-crowd there was no one who met the requirements of the telephone.

Bradshaw solved the problem by taking the instrument from the man's hand. Yes, he assented, of course business must take priority, that perhaps later, a meeting might be consummated, certainly, yes, at Senor Pratsore's Hotel, Hohkaye.

Thus it had always been in Bradshaw's dealings with the enigmatic Senor Orquienz. Nothing in Culture Shock had quite prepared Bradshaw for Senor Jesus-Maria Orquienz Contreras. This local magnate—landowner, importer and as his card stated, *"ingeniero,"* insisted, for reasons which Bradshaw deeply respected, that his meetings with the North American should be at the hour of the siesta. Senor Orquienz professed contempt for the unbusinesslike habits of his fellow countrymen and, in theory, kept *yanqui* business hours. However, if it was necessary for him to show his superiority to the Rafaeleanos, it was also necessary to show his superiority to Bradshaw, so that it was only on their first meeting that Senor Orquienz had observed his principles to the actual point of keeping the appointment. On that occasion also they had met at the Polar and Senor Orquienz

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had awakened the barman by lifting the man's head on its thin stalk of a neck and letting it thud back to the zinc-topped bar.

There had been cruelty and indifference in the gesture and Bradshaw would have protested had not Senor Orquienz so completely taken charge of matters. "*Ron y Siete Op*" he had ordered and thus, with this curiously translated soft drink began declaration of faith in The American Way Of Life.

He quickly disclosed a way of announcing the brand names of things with devotional pomp. "Pinseal" he said as he produced his alligator wallet. "Palm Beach" he announced as he checked the knife-edge crease in his sleeve.

To these patents of equality with Bradshaw, he added a brief autobiography which consisted largely of commercial coups of an unspecified kind, a glittering but vaguely located social success. "Often I am going to New York," he explained. "Ritz Carlton, Waldorf Astoria, Copacabana," he added, naming these credentials of familiarity.

Bradshaw had told the man. "Well, they've pulled down the Ritz. You'll have to stay somewhere else next time." Senor Orquienz was not disconcerted. "Is possible," he conceded, making the existence of the Ritz something that men of affairs and understanding could decide for themselves.

In all this Bradshaw recognized the troubling symptoms of what Mexicans called *pochismo*. He had steeled himself to expect the traditional hatred of the *coloso del norte*; when he met it, this most modest of *gringos* had no resentment. But *pochismo,* the uncritical admiration of all things American, he found embarrassing; indeed he shared Mexican contempt for it; for the wearer of the Harry Truman shirt, the devotee of baseball scores. But this was a more complex case. Time had played a trick on this amateur Yank. Isolated on this hopeless peninsula, Senor Orquienz had fallen for an America which had disappeared. The outmoded doctrine of "hustle" and "pep" had, it seems, found its last devotee. It was, in fact, upon Senor Orquienz' lips that Bradshaw first heard without irony these sad tags of Babbitt's '20s. Bradshaw could hardly believe his ears when Senor Orquienz had presented himself at the Gran Hotel and announced almost in his first sentence, and to the accompaniment of an actual back slap (definitely not an *abrazo*) that "in this one horse burg, I am Mister Big."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But this grotesque statement, Bradshaw found to be true. At first he had set his Russel Nype face (Bradshaw's wife, a New York girl, spoke of him with fond, proprietary derision to her friends as a "Nype type"), in incredulous disapproval of this; then he sternly told himself that it was all just a psychological curiosity of a certain stage of Latin American history. Were there not people in the Lesser Antilles or somewhere who spoke seventeenth-century (or was it Elizabethan?) English? What right had he Bradshaw to feel superior to this unreconstructed business booster, this anachronistic "go-getter." History, the god Bradshaw dimly served, loves a jest—even a poor one like Senor Orquienz.

It was somehow pathetic, and the fact was that Senor Orquienz was precisely what he represented himself to be—the big shot of San Rafael. It was to Senor Orquienz that Bradshaw was obliged to turn when he needed a car and *chofer*. Mysteriously, the one taxi of the place was unavailable until Senor Orquienz intervened to make arrangements.

The manager (the caretaker would have been a more accurate term) of one of the abandoned properties of the United Fruit Company had been hostile and invincibly obtuse until Bradshaw had returned to the place with Senor Orquienz, whereupon the man had become fluent and informative in English.

This, however, left still unsolved the mystery as to why Senor Orquienz should have attached himself to Bradshaw.

Thus, by degrees, Bradshaw had come to depend upon the good offices of this grotesque dignitary; and he forgave himself any hypocrisy in his dealings by telling himself that he was making use of the man for a cause better than he knew. "I have become altogether the Machiavelli about Mr. Beeg," he had written to his wife. Besides his instructions had urged "fullest cooperation with local elements," and it was the sad fact that Senor Orquienz was the only local element which showed any desire to be cooperated with.

The governor of the province was reputed to be half mad and what was worse more than half Fascist. Bradshaw himself had seen this tinpot *caudillo* escorted by a squadron of operatic motorcycle cops for a few ear-splitting minutes in the town square. There would be no help from this quarter.

Nor was the Church any help. Doggedly, Bradshaw had sought

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the cooperation of the Bishop, but his visit to the *obispado* had not been a success. The Bishop had heard him out politely enough, but had perhaps been diverted from Bradshaw's exposition of his program by the sight of a Phi Beta Kappa medal depending from the moorings of a chain at Bradshaw's trouser belt. During the interview the Bishop's bright black eyes wandered to this enigmatic amulet. Clearly, he feared this Greek bearing gifts. A Mason doubtless. Were not all the American Presidents Masons? They would surely select a lodge-brother for such a mission. Yet the cleric had expressed a general benevolence to Bradshaw's somewhat vague purposes, but at the mention of the cooperation given by Senor Orquienz had stiffened somewhat in manner and said something inaudible to the secretary who stood at his elbow. But Bradshaw on the whole was pleased with his visit (he had hoped merely to neutralize the Church rather than enlist its cooperation; after all, he could hardly expect this feudal institution to look happily on Bradshaw's program, which was to cram the Bishop's flock into greasy overalls—the Mother Hubbards, one might say, of industrial society). On the other hand, he had felt a pleasurable, undergraduate kind of *enfant terrible* naughtiness when he learned later that he had been the subject of an actual sermon at San Rafael y Todos Los Angeles in which the faithful had been warned against *iluminismo*, apparently some pernicious form of Freemasonry, and that his mission and Point IV—the object of his most laborious explanation to the Bishop—had regrettably taken on some sinister numerological significance—in impious competition, it seems, with the Santa Trinidad.

He had heard of this, of course, from Senor Orquienz, who true to his period type, professed a progressive Wellsian contempt for religion. This, Bradshaw thought, explained the Bishop's evident distaste at the mention of the man's name; in any case, Senor Orquienz was far too useful for Bradshaw to quibble over his character. Actually, he had become rather fond of the man, once he had decided to be amused at his pathetic efforts to resemble George Follinsbee Babbitt.

For his part, Senor Orquienz was quite unaware that Babbitt was as dead as Cotton Mather or Buffalo Bill, that he had, in fact, been slain by Bradshaw's generation. He quite simply assumed that Bradshaw's mission was concerned with making money. What else?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The very name of the great Foundation which employed Bradshaw spoke of entrenched millions. Bradshaw, to be sure, did not talk like a businessman, but Senor Orquienz assumed that this was merely Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy. They are too smart, he reasoned, these *Norte-americanos,* to say what they have in mind. Then, of course, there had been Bradshaw's foolish remark to the patron of the Gran Hotel, which had been promptly reported to Senor Orquienz.

Furthermore, Bradshaw, proud of a fluency newly acquired in an intensive course with language discs, sometimes insisted upon talking Spanish, but, alas, he was most at home in the present tense. This fact may have aroused in his auditor a misapprehension that the projects he was dealing with were of greater immediacy than they actually were.

Thus firmly based on misconception, a friendship of a sort had sprung up between the two. There had been minor troubles, such as the time Senor Orquienz had arranged a meeting with the local *jefe* of the department of public health. This official, rightly concluding that the inquisitiveness of this meddlesome *gringo* spelled work or trouble of some kind for him, had evaded Bradshaw successfully. A word from the potent Orquienz had made a meeting. At first Bradshaw had thought that he was a guest at the house of Senor Orquienz, for the address he had been given had brought him before an arched wrought iron gate. Bradshaw had been (as his generation said) "to bed" with seven women, and with all the best of reasons was horrified to discover that his business rendezvous was the town brothel. The place had seemed appropriate for two reasons. Despite the total ambiguity of his character, Senor Orquienz sometimes had an enviable directness of mind. His own house was unsuitable for such a meeting; it was filled, it seems with religious women, his sister, his mother and an aunt or two. Here, in any case, was the best evidence of the existence of the department of public health; its neatly-framed certificates, decorated a wall in each room. *Cerveza Moctezuma,* the excellent beer of Orizaba, was brought to them by modest and respectful girls, who retired to sit apart and giggle, Bradshaw was uncomfortably aware, mostly at him.

One looked at him through her fingers spread like a child's. There was embarrassment too from the side of the "health" official who turned out to be, Bradshaw was amazed to note, his own clerk—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or rather, he was the very man who had in the man's office three or four times told him that the chief was busy, was travelling, desperately sick, or was otherwise not available. Bradshaw rather envied the shameless tactics of this bureaucrat, but with Chinese delicacy, by now instinctive to him in San Rafael, he avoided mentioning this odd circumstance. So, too, did the health expert.

In any case, Senor Orquienz was again in charge of matters. He was treated with a special deference in the establishment, though not apparently merely as a good customer, for he gave Bradshaw quickly to understand that that sort of thing was not his "speed" at all. No, for his part, he preferred as, of course, businessmen did in the United States, as did Bradshaw himself he conveyed with a smirk, to "play the field"—one of his less dated idioms. A smart man, he insisted, neither got himself married, nor denied himself what was going. What was going, by his own account, was a great deal.

"One for Kinsey," Bradshaw thought as Senor Orquienz went on with his improbable narrative, which must have covered every nubile girl in San Rafael, not to speak of more expensive affairs in New York. Bradshaw was fond of beer, he was too young to have had his taste for it spoiled by prohibition, and the beer of Orizaba, even when bottled, is probably the best made in this hemisphere. He lapped it up. It had a tight, dense head in the big glasses, its surface aroma was of cream cheese, and it did not wash around the back teeth with a carious, arsenical aftertaste, like the American beers for which Senor Orquienz expressed a preference on the ground that their vast sales established a patent superiority. On the tide of this beer Bradshaw's mind became diffused, happy and muddled. He thought happily of the German brewers (the good Germans!) who had set up their vats and bred their yeast lines below the snowy crest of the noble Orizaba, ignoring wars One, Two or Three.

He was curiously elated, and because of this, his industrious New England mind set about justifying his happiness. Somehow, helped by the brew of the guiltless, exiled Germans, he composed the materials of the moment into what, if sober, he would have called a synthesis.

Everybody is basically O.K., he told himself. Suppose this fellow does want a world that liberal people have learned to despise, it's an improvement, at that, on what went before—the soldier perse-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cutors and the colonizers. Suppose the other fellow—the health official—is not what you would call exactly enlightened; perhaps his father planted corn with a pointed stick and bowed to images on the earth floor of a hut among the coughing children. I'm on the winning side, thought Bradshaw. "The hot air rises giving place to cold and God fulfills Himself in many ways," he misquoted happily, grinning foolishly at his own wit.

While thus bemused, Senor Orquienz' rambling sexual narrative went on. Was this just another fantasy like the Club Leones, for which Mexicans claimed to have obtained a charter from the U.S., though Bradshaw had not met any other member, nor had seen any evidence at all that it existed? Was it perhaps like Senor Orquienz' claim to be a direct descendant of the English privateer captains who had ravaged this coast? That in fact his name was a corruption of Hawkins! Not the great Hawkins, but a lesser pirate—one of "Admiral" Penton's lieutenants! This was too much for Bradshaw. For that *racé* American, a claim to distinction based on birth was merely bad taste, expressed as it was in the hearing of the cadaverous health official, who was clearly a *mestizo*. Or for that matter the girls of the establishment whose faces were those of charcoal designs on terra cotta plate. Yet perhaps there was something to the man's claim.

Amid his people with polls like the manes of black horses and of black Indian eyes, Senor Orquienz was an unusual man—a *rubeo,* with a rusty thatch, oddly-mottled skin and with a yellow eye like a dog's. Bradshaw had seen examples of this anomalous complexion among children in the streets; in his report (based on a speculative sentence in his technical material) he had attributed it to the peculiar and little-understood effect of some dietary deficiency; he had called it "the stain of hunger," although if anyone went hungry in San Rafael, it would not be Senor Orquienz.

Bradshaw had paid the *adición* that night. He was never to be quite sure whether the bill included the activities of the health expert who, after having gone into a trance over a well-thumbed set of dirty postcards, seemed to have disappeared somewhere along the line, and those of Senor Orquienz who had transparently said he would stay for a last drink or two. The *mozo* had finally answered the bell at the Grand Hotel.

"Know what," he said beerily to the servant. "Been cooperating

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with the local elements." He gave the man some money. "Know another thing. Local elements this moment, to best of my knowledge cooperating with themselves."

That had been two weeks ago. Now Bradshaw's air luggage stood on the stone floor of the Grand Hotel. Beside it lay a roll of gaudy serapes and a gourd or two. He was a bit ashamed of this tourist loot; he would have liked a few pre-Columbian figurines, but somehow, whether because of the absence of tourists or the iconoclastic zeal of the clergy, he had been able to find none of them in San Rafael. But he did have, wrapped in the serapes, a white board painted with a scene of resurrection which had been intended for a child's coffin lid, which had cost thirty pesos and which he knew his wife, who had American primitives round the apartment, would be crazy about. He had not seen anything wrong about buying the coffin lid; in some way his report justified him; perhaps, if his report did what he believed it would do, these people would think less about death because there would be less of it.

In one hour, if the taxi could start and the plane could get off the ground, he would be saying his farewells to San Rafael and to Senor Orquienz. It was only on this last day that Bradshaw had yielded to Senor Orquienz' repeated hints that he would like very much to have a "look-see" at Bradshaw's report.

Except for a little tinkering with the introduction it was almost ready for the typist, but Bradshaw was not confident that even thus far completed, it would convey very much to Senor Orquienz. Actually, it conveyed a great deal, though hardly what Bradshaw had intended.

Bradshaw had originally said with frank modesty that he was in San Rafael merely to "clean up" a report. An even more modest and accurate definition of his function would have been that his job was to "dress up" a report. In any case the explanation had for Senor Orquienz a purely commercial meaning. Somebody would clean up. A killing was in the air. A coup. A take. A melon would be cut. Senor Orquienz had nodded, heavy with complicity, his whole body a knowing wink. Since then he had behaved towards Bradshaw's briefcase as if it had contained something both valuable and disreputable—as if, under the pretense of peddling pornographic literature, Bradshaw were in reality a dealer in smuggled currency.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Senor Orquienz emerged from a thicket of potted palms, and shook hands with a delicate reticence toward his failure to keep the earlier appointment at the Polar.

Bradshaw handed over his report and said, without much confidence: "I don't suppose this will mean very much until—if and until —we get the team into the field. But it will help to give you the broad picture."

The picture it gave to Senor Orquienz as he spread the document on his knife-edged gabardine trousers was indeed broad, but not pleasing.

It has been suggested that Senor Orquienz was a foolish man, but he was not a fool about the thing that interested him most—money. On the scene of money, his gristly, overbred nose would twitch like that of a ferret within the ambience of a rabbit. Pointed towards Bradshaw's muffled New Deal prose, it failed to twitch. For the first time, it may be said, Senor Orquienz really got the word about Bradshaw's mission. He could find no angle. This talk of "teams" distressed him.

One section dealt with the need to relieve the peons from bondage to local usurers. It was probably this section which most distressed Senor Orquienz, and the incisive pen picture of a village shylock drawn by Bradshaw could hardly be expected to excite his sympathetic indignation for such a man would, more than likely, be one of his own agents. "Crop loans" of the type envisaged by the report would remove an important source of Senor Orquienz' income. Furthermore, the whole project would be under authority emanating from the capital at levels where Senor Orquienz was aware that his name, if known, was known unfavorably. But most of all, it was the picture of the whole enterprise as a cooperative thing which shocked him. Canning and processing cooperatives, fertilizer cooperatives, with no mention anywhere of profits.

The word cooperative had for Senor Orquienz the same horror and scandal as the word communism had for another generation. Quite simply this naturally malevolent man opposed socialism, not because it was bad, but because it was in aim good. Bradshaw, whose report was brilliantly contrived to cosset the current progressive feelings of enlightened American opinion, was thus calculated to arouse the malice of Senor Orquienz.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In particular, it was a section, or rather what a Sunday editor would call a feature story, designed to dramatize for the hardest Republican heart the plight of the people of San Rafael, and it purported to be the life story of Miguelito, a street waif. Beginning with his birth in unsanitary conditions within the compound of a fruit banana plantation, it took Miguelito through a series of misadventures in the course of which he lost his father, mother and brothers in a series of economic disasters.

"This Miguelito," he said with contempt, "I think I am—it is a made-up name, no?"

"Yes," said Bradshaw shortly, and started to explain, hating himself and Senor Orquienz for the necessity to do so, that Miguelito was a kind of symbol—typical, etc. of local conditions, etc., but Senor Orquienz dismissed this with a wave of the hand which encompassed Bradshaw and Bradshaw's baggage, looking suddenly foolish on the floor of the Grand Hotel.

"Miguelito," he said with a pronunciation which was a meanly accurate parody of Bradshaw's over-Castilian accent. "This Miguelito is not tormenting this lady."

There followed a heavy pause.

"She is tormenting him."

"But how can you know?" The initiative, which Bradshaw thought he had kept throughout, had passed to this absurd (or was it sinister?) man.

"Because I am thinking. I think he is my son."

Bradshaw was a "gentleman," that is to say, he was appalled to think that even by inadvertence he could cause offense to someone, as he thought, weaker than himself.

"I am sorry." Never had Bradshaw's crew cut hair looked more wistful, the face so full of drooping goodness, nor his voice more flat and sorrowful, almost Midwestern in its gravity and earnestness. "But, you see, look, it's just a story to dramatize the whole thing. . . ."

Senor Orquienz on the other hand looked almost demented with malice. The fact is that the native dignitary had grasped the heart of the matter—that whoever handled this project, it would not be Bradshaw; that he had needlessly wasted time and goodwill on someone of no consequence. He felt that he had been the victim of some kind of confidence trick.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From his grilled hatchment, the fat patron looked at the scene with interest and satisfaction. Sooner or later, he had always known, the gringo would come on the wrong side of Don Jesus-Maria.

Bradshaw had paid his bill (it had hardly been double the usual rates) so that the patron could look with the proper detachment at the pleasurable scene; in his experience it was not wise to come on the wrong side of Don Jesus-Maria, that *trompa roja,* that red elephant nose.

He saw the gringo put the papers in his bag, and, clutched on the arm by Don Jesus-Maria walk out across the square.

Bradshaw would have liked to have spent his last hour or so in San Rafael looking about with the fresh eye of someone who knows he is leaving a place for perhaps the last time.

"There must be some misunderstanding," he kept saying, as he and Senor Orquienz turned into the broad *calle* where on that first fateful morning he had seen the curious little drama of the mad woman and the tormenting children which had so impressed him and which he had made the basis for his parable of San Rafael.

There, beneath the arched *puerta,* the mad woman had taken her place. The children too. Here, in San Rafael, where nothing worked by time or schedule, this alone—this evil little drama—was as regular as the bus itself was not regular.

"Permit me to tell you what are the facts of the matter," said Senor Orquienz. "So you will not print a lot of bunk. Every morning my sister is going to church. Yes, this is my house and that is my sister."

As Bradshaw digested this disconcerting intelligence, he observed that the children seemed even more wary of the man than of the woman. They backed away in a circle as from a dog of uncertain temper. Orquienz scattered a handful of *centavos*; they picked it up with wary familiarity, like city pigeons.

"Chicken feed," said Senor Orquienz. "But I am saying my sister comes every day from the church. At the church she prays that I will repent of my sins, and that I will be punished for them. She prays God" (and here Senor Orquienz made a grimace of disgust as if some unpleasant thing were in his mouth) "will punish me. Of course he is doing nothing of the sort. Is too busy—over there," said

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the man with a jerk of his sharp, padded shoulder toward San Rafael y Todos Los Angeles. Bradshaw's discomfiture had evidently cheered the man up; his receding anger had left him in possession of a vast gratifying sneer.

"So," he said, "she must do what God is too busy to do. She must punish me. Of course, she cannot do this, so she must punish the results of my sins."

"But how?" Bradshaw asked stupidly. "How can she know?"

Infinitely patronizing, Senor Orquienz raised his panama, indicating his mottled brow and reddish thatch, and with a lean forefinger indicated three of the children shrinking into the shadows by the wall.

These were, by color, the "nutritional casualties" of Bradshaw's report—rust-red, spindle-shanked, distorted, it was now apparent by heredity, rather than poverty.

"All 'awkins," said Senor Orquienz, with complacence. "All *rubeos*.

"She buys candy to give them. If they come near enough to take it, she. . . ." Here, Senor Orquienz gave Bradshaw's arm a sharp tweak, so that he snatched it away, angrily.

"But your sister?" asked Bradshaw. He was about to ask could not the unhappy woman be given some suitable medical treatment when a phrase from the Merriwell books came into his head with supreme absurdity: "A fellow's sister is sacred."

Not, however, to the unspeakable Orquienz.

"You are sorry for them and you are sorry for her. You are stupid. Look! I do not think she is hating me very much, no? She is hating them because they are not her keeds, not because they are my keeds.

"But, I do not think she is hating me very much.

"Look," and with one hand, Senor Orquienz smoothed his upper lip in a gesture acquired from some film. "I think she is mostly crazy for me, no?" Indeed, a blurred smile had moved upon the woman's mad face; Orquienz proffered his Palm Beach sleeve as one being measured for a suit and Bradshaw was aware that the woman's blanched claw had fastened on it, but not in anger, nor in token punishment, but in a tender appraising way as one testing the flesh of a mango, and that she was uttering low crooning syllables of endearment.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alberto Moravia

PORTRAIT OF MACHIAVELLI

In these notes I shall speak only of the *Prince* and the *Mandragola* and some of the minor works, not of the *Histories,* the *Discourses,* or the *Art of War.* The reason is that I do not intend to write an essay on the political works of Machiavelli but only on certain of his characteristics, and it seems to me that these emerge more clearly in the writings I have selected than elsewhere. In particular, I want to try to define Machiavellianism—however much or little of Machiavellianism is inseparable from Machiavelli. By Machiavellianism I mean not a theory of politics but a moral passion, which found in Machiavelli an unconscious but perfect exponent. Hence these notes will take shape rather as a psychological portrait than a critical essay.

It will be objected that Machiavellianism is nothing but a slanderous fiction invented by posterity and by his less disinterested critics; and that Machiavelli developed a line of thought in all his works that was rigorously coherent. To this I answer that in many of his writings, and often in the *Prince* too, Machiavelli is in fact no more Machiavellian than any other political thinker. But all the same, there remain a certain number of facts that absolutely cannot be explained if one considers Machiavelli as a mere essayist in the same class, say, as a Montaigne or as his contemporary Guicciardini. Facts, moreover, which are so loaded with a satisfaction that is not just verbal, so extravagant, so fundamentally un-thought-through, that when one comes up against them, one must necessarily either ignore them—as do most of Machiavelli's admirers—or denounce them hotly, moralistically, as his enemies have always done. Both attitudes, examined closely, are equally evasive and unsatisfactory.

Posterity has always rebelled against certain of the tenets and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

developments of the Machiavellian doctrine, just as it will always rebel against attitudes or preachings or theories in which it discovers instinctively the odor of a personal interest rather than thought that is free. In other words, a system of thought may appear at first sight unusual, odd, even aberrant, and yet offend no one, precisely because it is thought and nothing but thought; and sooner or later that which appeared unusual, odd, unbalanced, will become acceptable, normal, and obvious. For example, the doctrine of Christianity appeared to many ancient thinkers as a morbid paradox; but in less than two centuries it turned out to be nothing less than the thought of all humanity, and it gave content to the life of all men. The thought of Machiavelli, on the other hand, at a distance of four centuries, retains something embarrassing, singular, uncontrolled, even for the most open-minded reader. Far from becoming normal and giving content to the life of all men, it seems to remain attached to the figure of its creator, like a vice or some other wholly personal trait. In other words, it turns out to be different from thought in many ways, something that seems to be thought and in reality is not. The irritation which posterity has felt toward the work of Machiavelli derives mainly from the fact that never was a personal attitude better concealed and developed with the method that is proper to thought. On the other hand, a judgment of Machiavellianism is rendered difficult by the presence of real thought mixed with what is not thought; Machiavelli's political science is put to the service of sentiments and passions which have little or nothing to do with science itself.

There does indeed exist in the work of Machiavelli a very large sum total of extremely exact observations, a rigorous logic, a constructive power and a method which claim the attention and admiration of the reader, even when he is most unprepared. But alongside of these qualities, which are the most solid foundations of Machiavelli's glory, there exists also something else which Machiavelli could not and did not want to conceal. For few writers have been as sincere as Machiavelli; in fact, in his candor one recognizes the greatness of the man. And it is, of course, a constant trait of great men to offer themselves openly and disarmed, as though they were sure of their own inner strength and complexity.

But it is precisely this candor which permits us to disassociate Machiavellianism from the political science of Machiavelli. Another

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man than he, more wary and prudent, would have known how to round out certain angles, to hide certain parts, in short, not to write the *Prince* at all. With the *Discourses* alone Machiavelli's fame as the creator of political science would have been just as well assured. We would have had a Machiavelli no less profound, perspicacious, exact, systematic, new. A Machiavelli without Machiavellianism; or with so little Machiavellianism that no one would have noticed it. We owe the *Prince* to Machiavelli's sincerity. A poetic book, the *Prince* not only crowns and closes the work of Machiavelli, but above all adds clearly the note of Machiavellianism. Illuminated by the *Prince,* the other writings of Machiavelli reveal in their turn whatever Machiavellianism they contain.

And we know very well that Machiavellianism has always existed and always will exist. Yet the fact remains that it was the choice and the vocation of Machiavelli; that it was Machiavelli and not someone else who discovered its scattered fragments in history and put them together in a single vigorous and terrible mold. Similarly sadism existed before De Sade; but it was De Sade who first described it and gave it a name. I think that if there had not been a sympathetic attraction such as fire has for things that are very dry or oily, Machiavelli would never have discovered, built into a system, and given a name to the type of moral attitude which is called Machiavellianism.

Many people have thought they discovered in the *Mandragola* the original source of a supposed Italian theater which then, nobody knows why, never did come into being (Goldoni is something quite different from Italian theater). In my opinion, the *Mandragola* is not a beginning, but the most exhausted and lifeless of endings. I am not alluding here to the crudities, the corruption, the cynicism which one notes in the comedy. Let us say at once that if these were real crudities, corruption, cynicism, if they were felt by the author as such, the *Mandragola* would be much more alive, and indeed might have been a beginning of an Italian theater. But in the *Mandragola* there is cynicism, corruption, crudity only because we—modern readers living in an entirely different world with entirely different conventions—see them there, not because Machiavelli intended to put them in. In other words, Machiavelli intended to compose a kind

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of farce; and if the farce turned out to be bitter and painful, this happened against his will, and up to a certain point without his knowledge.

The proof lies in the almost complete lack of irony and detachment, which in a work like this should establish a difference and a distance between the author and his characters, and testify to a moral torment that knows how to control and balance itself, in order better to achieve the effects it intended. In the *Mandragola* there isn't any irony or sarcasm, but only a kind of dark delight, a dry satisfaction, a weary sincerity on the part of one who did not wish, nor would have been able had he so wished, to see very much beyond the naiveté of Lucretia, the foolishness of Nicia, the corruption of Timoteo. If Fra Timoteo in his smallness and abjection had stood out against the background of some large reality that touched Machiavelli's heart, his predicament could have been satirical or indeed upsetting. But not having any relationship with the personage of Timoteo, Machiavelli does no more than copy him from life, putting him together out of the naked elements of reality. And things go no better with the other personages. As a contrast to Timoteo's religion, there should have been the innocence of Lucretia. The women of Boccaccio are also often presented as "completely honorable," and then reveal themselves to be stupid, if not worse. But note how this stupidity changes into corruption, and is described shrewdly: with what delight, what liveliness, what detachment, what good taste. Boccaccio, apart from being a greater artist, has a fresher and more intact moral sensibility. Lucretia on the other hand is stupid because Machiavelli wanted to make her virtuous. She has neither a conscience nor a moral sense, and once in bed with Callimacus she loses all at once her famous honor and turns out to be no less insensitive than her lover and all the other characters. In all probability Machiavelli really believed that he had represented the world as it is, not "as it ought to be"; that he had portrayed innocence in Lucretia, love in Callimacus, religion in Timoteo. But actually he had given us a physiological innocence composed of passivity and ignorance, a lecherous love that expresses itself in physical aches and distress, a religion that is practical and mechanical, limited to conventional devotions. About innocence, love and religion, the learned, so intelligent Machiavelli had ideas no different from those of the common folk of his century and alas, also of ours.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I have said that the *Mandragola* is the mirror of a soul which is profoundly dried up in what concerns private emotions, religion, and the ethical conscience. The *Prince* and the other political works are an attempt, magnificently successful, to galvanize this soul by means of the only passion which was any longer entertained there: the political passion.

One could accept Machiavelli's political passion as an obvious factual reality. Machiavelli was in politics, he cherished political ambitions, he did not spend time on anything else: what wonder if he had a passion for it? But it seems to me that the thing is not so simple. Guicciardini was also a professional in politics on a par with Machiavelli; and yet the passion does not exist in him, or if it does it is subordinated to a serene and sad clarity of vision. The problem of Machiavelli's political passion is basically the same as that of his political science: when is it legitimate to subordinate every other value and sentiment to politics; why does this happen; and when it happens, up to what point can politics take the place of other deficiencies which are implicit in its supremacy? To clarify this, the comparison with Guicciardini is again useful. Guicciardini had a temperament rather different from that of Machiavelli. A less vehement man of genius, less imaginative, less artistic, he still had, nonetheless, and perhaps because of the difference in temperament, a moral personality of greater integrity, a more acute conscience, a more balanced intelligence. Even his cult of the *particulare*[1] attests basically to a respect for human freedom which it would be impossible to find in Machiavelli. It is true that the *particulare* does not seem to be more than the totality of the material interests of the individual; but nothing forbids one's thinking that in more favorable conditions the *particulare* might signify the development of the moral personality. That Guicciardini falls back on individual happiness is at bottom an act of optimism; the *particulare* at first sight may appear to be nothing more than an egoist; but on further examination one sees that he is at any rate a man, whereas the subject of the prince is not a man but inert matter. And therefore from the subject one may expect nothing; but from the *particulare*—whenever the

1 "Private man," as distinguished from *l'homme engage*, a term used by Guicciardini for which there is no exact English equivalent.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

times should permit it and when his narrow cultivation of his own private interests had borne fruit—one might expect a deep renewal which at a bound would revive the entire nation. "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's," Guicciardini seems to want to say: but is this not also the reply of Christianity to all those who would like to settle public affairs before private ones? The *particulare* has no passions, and certainly no political passions; his chief end is to save himself; the man of Machiavelli no longer has anything to save, and the political passion, for want of real individual interests, is his last remaining lifeline. Not being free within himself, as a result of corruption or spiritual impoverishment, he must of necessity make freedom consist of an illusory participation in political affairs. In short, man as seen either by Guicciardini or by Machiavelli is far removed from the ideal which tempers private life with public service. The first sacrifices all other values to the *particulare,* the second to politics. But the first at least, as Voltaire says at the end of *Candide,* "cultivates his garden."

Accordingly for Machiavelli, so emotionally dried up and exhausted, worn out and weakened, politics meant much more than a simple occupation and duty, much more than an intellectual pastime; politics were a goad and a reason for living—an artificial means of feeling morally alive. This desperate clinging to political life, now that the moral and religious life was dead, explains first of all the abstract thought in Machiavelli, which was not nourished by any deep ethical feeling; and it explains also the particular form Machiavelli had to adopt to express his thought.

Think about it: Machiavelli was a republican, and had, furthermore—as is obvious in every passage of the *Discourses* and the *Prince* —a very clear idea, absolutely firm and irreducible, of what freedom was, what its advantages were, what evil effects could result from its suppression. If this were not enough, the torture to which he was subjected at the time of the Boscoli and Capponi conspiracies must have rekindled in him, with unforgettable physical arguments, his convinced and reasoned appreciation of the free life. And yet it is precisely this same Machiavelli, esteemer of liberty and defender of the republican regime, who offered his services to the Medici immediately after their return to Florence, and who in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the end wrote the most perfect treatise we know in favor of autocracy. All this seems contradictory in the highest degree. But the contradiction, in reality, is only apparent.

In the most famous of his personal letters, the one addressed to Francesco Vettori dated December 1, 1515, Machiavelli gives a very lively description of his life in the country. This letter shows us Machiavelli going hunting, quarreling with the townspeople over a few sticks of wood, standing in the street to question passers-by, playing dice with a miller, a butcher and two brickmakers. Then evening comes and he takes off his muddy and soiled everyday clothes, gets into courtly royal garments, and appears in the ancient courts of the ancient lords to converse with them; or, as he announces to Vettori later in the letter, he writes the *Prince*. The letter is very beautiful, especially because of the contrast, energetically expressed, between the high thoughts and dignity of Machiavelli, and the uncultured and uncouth world around him. But this contrast does not appear without a kind of cruel and bitter satisfaction, as though this were a man who needed to see himself unrecognized and underestimated in order fully to realize his own value. "And so I go back among these lice, I let my brain mildew, and thus get relief from the perversity of my lot, and I am glad that they kick me around in this way, so I may see whether or not they are ashamed of what they have done." This is certainly not the tone of a man who knows what he is worth, and seeing himself misunderstood withdraws proudly into his own home and leads the life of a humanist. Rather one feels here a kind of voluptuous pleasure in self-abasement, which—note well—acts as a stimulus; like a spring which acquires its full force only when it is pressed. "I am glad they kick me around." The phrase is very significant and betrays a turbulent, twisted unhappiness. For Machiavelli misfortune is a kind of tonic. His ethical exhaustion does not allow him the tranquil independence of the free and victorious spirit. It compels him to resort to these desperate measures. But they are dangerous remedies; and once the sensibility becomes habituated to them, it can no longer do without them. When he appeals to the Medicis to let him at least "twirl a stone," this is the same order of ideas as the phrase about being kicked around by fate. In the first instance there is almost a satisfaction in abasement, to be felt as such, not adjusted to. In the second there is an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aspiration to have any status whatsoever, however humiliating, provided he may still feel himself alive. In both cases Machiavelli is trying to stimulate a sensibility which is otherwise lazy and inert. So also the *Prince,* on a higher level, is nothing but a lever to lift up the deadly weight of this apathy.

In reality Machiavelli needed to live, needed to feel himself alive. It is well known that this need is not felt by men of real vitality, all of whose activities are equally in balance and alive. Such men, in a desperate situation, can always take refuge in their *particulare,* which may be—aside from personal interests as we have already said—the righteous and tranquil conscience, the taste for independence, the sense of mystery. The exhausted and insufficient man, on the other hand, feels a need to make his own sensibility bleed, to twist tight his own feelings, as with a cord, in order to strengthen them. Accordingly various contradictions result. One arrives at the Marquis de Sade, who could not love without simulating the actions of the most bitter hatred. Or, in quite a different order of ideas, such is also the case with Machiavelli. If he had been a normal, balanced man, Machiavelli would not have written the *Prince,* but rather his political "Memoirs." He would not have tried to serve the Medici, but would have withdrawn, contentedly, to the country. Instead, the need to escape drowning in apathy, indifference, in the boredom of a life without passions or employment—this drives him to inflict mortal wounds on himself, merely in order to feel that he is alive; to serve in order to have a function. Thus from a spasmodic desire for life, expressed in conscious cruelty, there was born the *Prince,* that encomium of autocracy written by a republican.

As a result, what he had not succeeded in doing for religion with Fra Timoteo, for innocence with Lucretia, for love with Callimacus, Machiavelli finally did achieve for freedom in the last personage he created, the Prince. The fact is that whereas the corruption of Timoteo, the ruin of Lucretia and the lust of Callimacus did not cut into any of his ideals nor contradict any of his hopes, but conformed perfectly to what he considered obvious daily reality to be, the Prince instead, in all his actions and precepts, inflicts wounds and draws blood from that tiny bit of living flesh which Machiavelli still had amid the paralysis of all his faculties. In the *Prince* there is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all the tension, the rigor, the cruelty, the strenuous relentlessness of reasoning which is sharpened by suffering. But this two-sidedness is hardly conducive to the equilibrium and coherence of an intellect that is free from all special motivation. It is typical of all voluptuous pleasures, whether sad or cruel, to extend beyond reasonable, sane limits. To this kind of passion, which turns back on itself in order to feel more alive, we owe that degree of unilateralness, of disproportion, of monstrousness in short, which marks the so-called political science of the *Prince*. To call the precepts of the Prince "political science" would be like calling the not disinterested advice of the Marquis De Sade an *"ars amandi."* In both cases, one particular aspect of a whole function is set up as law, thanks to the inability to feel alive whenever the preferred activity is harmonized with all the other activities that are typical of the spirit: the inability to love, or to engage in politics, while respecting the independence and existence of all the other values.

This is not to deny that Machiavelli, writing the *Prince,* had it in mind to compose a purely political treatise, and to depict an ideal figure of a statesman who would be able to drive out the barbarians and unify Italy—someone modeled on the great monarchies to the north or on certain Italian principates. Of Machiavelli's patriotism there is no doubt; nor does one doubt all the other qualities and merits attributed to him very convincingly by the criticism of the last decades. What I want to show is not that this or that quality or virtue is lacking, but rather that they are insufficient to counterweigh certain pre-existing psychological characteristics which give rise to all the contradictions and excesses of so-called Machiavellianism. In other words, in my opinion the grandiose machine of the Machiavellian doctrine is put in motion by a motor that has nothing to do with politics. Hence the explosive, lyrical, peremptory character of the *Prince*: as if, once the machine had been set up and everything prearranged, the motor suddenly began to turn over by itself in an unforeseen, violent way, throwing the whole construction into peril.

Machiavelli talks a good deal in the *Prince* about the various means of conquering and holding a principate, and about the different problems that arise in such matters. In enumerating the various types of principate he also mentions the ecclesiastical holdings. At this point we come to the famous and ironical passage on the Church

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

states: "They alone have states and do not defend them; subjects and do not govern them: whence the states being undefended are not taken away from them; and the subjects being ungoverned show no concern about this. Wherefore only these principates are secure and happy. But as the cause is due to superior reasons beyond human comprehension, I will not attempt to speak of them; for they are supported and maintained by God, so that he would be presumptuous who would dare discourse of them." Now in this passage one must notice, apart from Machiavelli's antipathy and bitterness toward the Church and its politics within Italy and internationally, that there is a final, definitive condemnation of medieval politics, which are indivisible precisely from those "superior reasons beyond human comprehension." In other words, in a negative form there is mirrored here the distinction between politics and morality, politics and religion, politics and ideals, which is the most solid foundation of Machiavelli's glory and his political science. Let us observe in passing that Machiavelli's judgment on the Church states, while brilliant and justified by the long medieval constriction, is unfounded historically because he is considering those states at the exact moment when all their historical, psychological, moral, political and cultural justifications had ceased to be, and when the politics of the papacy, in its practice as in its ends, no longer differed from that of all the other Italian principates. Machiavelli could not have drawn the same conclusion about the Church and its politics with reference to, say, the time of Hildebrand or even Boniface. But let us proceed.

What I mean to say is that the violent separation of politics from morality, from ideology, from religion, does not lead to the creation of a political science but rather to a political technique. For while it is more than doubtful that science can release itself from ethical values or in any case ignore them, technical know-how—being concerned only with the carrying out of acts and not with what happens before or after—is by its nature amoral and indifferent. Technique is only one moment in the scientific process, and not even the most important one.

Now if one remembers how in examining the *Mandragola* and the minor works we defined Machiavelli as not immoral but morally exhausted, one can explain how he was able to make this separation and give so much importance to the technique of politics. Technique —while certainly valid when one speaks of the construction of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

machine or the damming of a river—has in my opinion nothing more than the purely negative value of a constriction and a falsification when it is applied to matters which we must call things of the spirit. And who are those who most readily apply technique to activities which have nothing to do with technique? Precisely those men whose moral conscience is on the point of being extinguished, or in whom it has not yet been born; men whose intellectual powers become arbitrary and gratuitous because they are out of balance due to the lack of other deeper forces. Technique, this key which opens all doors except those of the spirit, is the special divinity of men and nations which are worn out or still at a barbarian stage; of those whose moral life, through fatigue or innocence, is almost spent or yet to come: for men and nations which have a complete culture make use of technique, but do not place it on the altar. On the other hand, in men and nations which are exhausted or primitive, technique flatters the pride which believes it can thereby dethrone the spirit and attain mechanically results which others have reached by the slow and secret paths of culture and the virtues of the mind. In a broad sense these men and peoples are profoundly irreligious: in the sense of completely skeptical or even completely ignorant.

Guicciardini, to whom one must necessarily refer when speaking of Machiavelli, has a cruel sentence about those who frequently cite the example of Rome. "What a mistake is made by those who at every moment allude to the Romans. It would be necessary to have a city conditioned as theirs was, and then govern according to their example: otherwise the comparison is as out of proportion, for someone having disproportionate qualities, as it would be to expect a donkey to run the way a horse does." Now in my opinion Machiavelli's error lay not so much in his alluding to the Romans at every other word, as in the external and rhetorical way he referred to them; he looked back to the supposed political technique of that great people for the simple reason that he was not in a position to see what other sources of strength, far more valid and profound than purely political and military virtues, had contributed to build their greatness. Perhaps, in one word, religious virtues, not merely technical ones. Precisely those virtues which had made the greatness of the papacy which Machiavelli scorned; those sources of strength which come from considering how one should live and not how one does live, from abandoning what is done for what should be done.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Let us come now to the most famous and controversial chapter of the *Prince,* the last chapter where in an apparently unexpected way Machiavelli sets up the "Prince" and the "lion and the wolf," and writes the exhortation to drive out the barbarians from Italy. In general, aside from paying no attention to this chapter, as many readers do, there are two theses to explain it: the first, that the chapter is a pure and simple contradiction of what precedes; the second, that the whole *Prince* was written in the light of this chapter and in short Machiavelli becomes here the prophet of the liberation and unification of Italy. I believe both theses are equally wrong.

The last chapter is a vehement exhortation to drive out the barbarians and rebuild the *patria.* Yet the entire *Prince* is nothing but a work of destruction of precisely those elements which constitute the *patria.* The *patria* is not an abstract concept nor a pure geographic expression: apart from the land and the men, it is the culture, tradition, religion, customs, arts, affects, freedom. If all these elements were non-existent or corrupted or absorbed or destroyed, very little would remain of the *patria*—an abstraction behind which would hide forces with different ends and a different nature: for example the interests of an oligarchy or a dynasty. Now Machiavelli's Prince must necessarily first destroy all these elements I have just enumerated, if he is to attain the power which will then uphold him. If Machiavelli had really understood the Prince in this way, he would have done approximately the same thing that the Jesuits and other casuists of the Counter Reformation did when they put the very glory of God at the service of their systems of sophistic and calculated prudence which destroyed all true religious feeling. To make matters worse there is also this difference: while the men of the Counter Reformation were trying to restore an aged and defeated order, and therefore had the excuse of being at the end and not the beginning of a long and irrevocable historical process, Machiavelli, as everyone knows, is a herald and a precursor of the absolute monarchies, as well as a patriot who favored a unified Italy. Now this would be curious to say the least: that Machiavelli, who judged the Italy of his time as the most corrupt country in the world, and who in the *Prince* and his other works had given an unforgettable picture of this corruption, should then not find anything better to redeem Italy than the bourgeois figure of his Prince, who uses means derived directly from that corruption.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For all these reasons I refuse to believe that Machiavelli, who was elsewhere so keen in evaluating good and bad politics, could have intended explicitly to write the *Prince* in reference to the final chapter. Or that the patriotism and indignation against the barbarians which undeniably enliven the last chapter, serve also as scaffolding for the remaining twenty-five. I do believe that the last chapter is indeed what it wants to appear to be, an exhortation to liberate and unify Italy; and that all the rest of the *Prince* is instead a kind of logical, rigorously inevitable, cruel outburst of Machiavelli's moral passion. But far from there being a contradiction here, these two parts—so different in inspiration, in substance—are bound together by a bond that is primarily psychological.

The bond, in my opinion, is to be sought in the soul of Machiavelli. That is, in the intrinsic weakness of the man, exhausted as I have said in respect to ethical values, and yet unable to recognize this exhaustion—a recognition that would have been a source of strength, and which in personages like Valentino would have translated itself immediately into action. Somehow, for all his realistic sense, Machiavelli failed to feel pride in his abnormality. Probably there was a residue of a Christian conscience which did not allow him to arrive at the final consequences of certain theories he had formulated. A Machiavelli really worthy of the accusation of Machiavellianism would have closed the *Prince* with chapter twenty-five, thus giving us a book which was beautiful rather than wise, perfect rather than useful, lived and experienced rather than thought through—a real Medusa's head which would have fascinated and confused uncomprehending readers for centuries. A Machiavelli who was a poet and not a practical thinker would have been satisfied to deal with the fantastic figure of the Prince in an indestructible prose. But Machiavelli had written the *Prince* not out of a conscious Machiavellianism or the conscious wish to condense into one book all that he had learned and practiced during his years as a professional in politics; nor with the instinct of a poet who observes with delight and cherishes a terrible figure in a wholly aesthetic atmosphere. Instead, as I have already said, he wrote in order to drag himself up from the mire of indifference, to prove to himself that he was alive, to hurt himself and feel the pain. For such a Machiavelli, undermined as he was by this autobiographical situation, there had to be a catharsis, as a conclusion of the almost voluptuous wallowing in his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

own sincerity. Any catharsis, provided it would free him from the atrocious anarchic individualism into which his very coherence plunged him; provided it re-admitted him to the warmth of humanity. A catharsis, in short, which would calm the feelings of excess and extravagance which the writing of the *Prince* could not have failed to arouse in him.

This catharsis could not, given the premises, be religious. A Machiavelli who, at the close of the *Prince,* looked forward like Savonarola to the coming of a new Christianity which would purify the Italians from below would have been not only inconceivable but really inconsistent. So instead the catharsis was found in patriotism. By a characteristic transfer of his decadence into rhetoric, Machiavelli tried to manage the impossible transmutation of a vast sum of negative values into one single positive value: the *patria.*

For all these reasons I believe that in the lyrical exhortation of the final chapter one should see neither a premeditated conclusion nor a political act, but merely the sigh for liberation and redemption of a man who had been driven throughout the whole book to the most remorseless and unbearable conclusion. In this light certainly the accusations of immorality which have always been raised against Machiavelli will have to fall. The last chapter, in short, is nothing but the collapse of an exhausted runner at the end of the relay, a kind of plea for pity and rest.

Rest, above all. For Machiavelli did not realize, as I have already said, that he had created in the Prince a figure fully as beautiful and literary as, say, Iago. Going over his thoughts, too blood-soaked for further action, he must have felt the impossibility of concluding the book in the same mood in which he had begun it. The accusation of immorality which posterity later made against Machiavelli he himself, in short, with understandable scruples, was the first to make against himself. All this perhaps was not wholly conscious; and yet, looking at the last chapter, it is legitimate to think that such was the chain of events. But the operation was psychological, and could not be political; or rather, if it had been political it could only have failed. Think about it: Machiavelli's Prince, with the skepticism, violence, ambitions, means which we know, suddenly at a certain point—as though tired and filled with repugnance toward his own being—decides to sublimate this ensemble of negative qualities through the positive quality of love of country. We may be

DIGITISED BY NZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

allowed to imagine that this desire for sublimation will remain an intention, and rather than express itself in action will be expressed by rhetoric.

Here one touches upon one of the most delicate and secret aspects of the personality of Machiavelli: the discrepancy between the energetic, realistic, exact observer of political affairs and the literary humanist of certain passages of the *Discourses* and the *Prince*. We know that Machiavelli was not a rhetorician nor an empty and formal man of letters like so many of his contemporaries; and yet rhetoric, without his realizing it, swells many of his pages and leaves them empty. Now rhetoric, that alluding to the Romans every few words, is, as Guicciardini says, the result of an inadequate and imperfect sublimation of the decadent in Machiavelli—of his unsatisfied desire for a catharsis which would renew and purify him. If Machiavelli had been, like Guicciardini, a mediocre man who was perfectly conscious of his own limitations and balanced and ordered within them, then he would not have alluded to the Romans; nor would he have done so if he himself had been sufficiently Roman not to feel the need of talking about them. Instead, he has neither enough mediocrity nor enough greatness. He does not accept his state of exhaustion, and at the same time he does not have the strength (and how could he?) to convert it into a positive and truly energetic state. The result is the Humanism and the literariness which conspicuously mark his more lofty tones. As though, to use the words of Machiavelli himself, he is speaking of something he would like to be and is not.

And yet, something he would like to be. The seriousness of Machiavelli's humanistic rhetoric lies in this strenuous aspiration, in the service of which he desperately puts all the best, the most alive qualities he has to offer. In short, his is a tragic humanism, which rests on a twisted and anxious psychological basis. This distinguishes Machiavelli both from the cold and jesuitical political thinkers and from the literary rhetoricians who followed him. It also explains the contradiction in him; and at the same time it furnishes a proof of the slight interest there can be in his thought, and justifies the stubborn diffidence of all those who, even without knowing why, have doubts about the basis of his theories in the *Prince,* and about the validity of the chapter which closes the book.

(*Translated from the Italian by Gertrude Hooker*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Simon O. Lesser

THE IMAGE OF THE FATHER

A Reading of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and "I Want to Know Why"

The scene of Hawthorne's story "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" is a New England colony; the time, like the place not too precisely fixed, a "moonlight" night during that period before the Revolution when Great Britain "had assumed the right of appointing the colonial governors."

A young boy of eighteen, named Robin, has come to town to seek his relative, Major Molineux. The Major is either governor of the colony or a subordinate of high rank—just which is not made clear. The boy has good reasons for wanting to find him. He is the second son of a poor clergyman. His elder brother is destined to inherit the farm "which his father cultivated in the interval of sacred duties." The Major is not only rich and influential but childless, and, during a visit paid his cousin the clergyman a year or two before the story opens, has shown an interest in Robin and his brother and hinted he would be happy to establish one of them in life. Robin has been selected for the honor, handsomely fitted out in homespun, and, to cover the expenses of his journey, given half the remnant of his father's salary of the year before.

Just before reaching the town Robin has had to cross a river, and it occurs to him that he should have perhaps asked the ferryman to direct him to the home of his kinsman or perhaps even accompany him as a guide. But he reflects that the first person he meets will serve as well. To his surprise, however, he experiences rebuff after rebuff, difficulty upon difficulty. He asks an elderly gentleman to direct him, but the man not only disclaims any knowledge of the Major; he rebukes Robin so angrily—the youth has impulsively gripped the old man's coat—that some people nearby roar with laughter. Robin now wanders through a maze of deserted

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

streets near the waterfront. Coming to a still-open tavern, he decides to make inquiry there. He is at first cordially received, but as soon as he asks to be directed to his relative, the innkeeper begins to read the description of an escaped "bounden servant," looking at Robin in such a way as to suggest that the description fits him exactly. Robin leaves, derisive laughter ringing in his ears for the second time that night.

Now the youth loiters up and down a spacious street, looking at each man who passes by in the hope of finding the Major. He is now so tired and hungry that he begins to consider the wisdom of lifting his cudgel and compelling the first passerby he meets to direct him to his kinsman. While toying with this idea, he turns down an empty and rather disreputable street. Through the half-open door of the third house he passes he catches a glimpse of a lady wearing a scarlet petticoat and decides to address his inquiry to her. His appearance and voice are winning, and the lady steps outside to talk to him. She proves both attractive and hospitable. Intimating that she is the housekeeper of the Major, who she says is asleep, she offers to welcome the youth in his stead. Though Robin only half believes her, he is about to follow her when she is startled by the opening of a door in a nearby house and leaves him to run into her own.

A watchman now approaches, muttering sleepy threats. They are perfunctory, but sufficient to discourage Robin temporarily from inquiring for his kinsman. He shouts an inquiry just as the watchman is about to vanish around a corner, but receives no reply. Robin thinks he hears a sound of muffled laughter. He quite clearly hears a pleasant titter from an open window above his head, whence a round arm beckons him. Being a clergyman's son and a good youth, Robin flees.

He now roams through the town "desperately, and at random, . . . almost ready to believe that a spell was on him."

Encountering a solitary passerby in the shadow of a church steeple, Robin insists on being directed to the home of his kinsman. The passerby unmuffles his face. He proves to be a man Robin had noticed earlier at the tavern, but now half of his face has been painted a livid red, the other half black. Grinning at the surprised youth, the man tells him that his kinsman will pass that very spot within the hour. Robin settles down on the church steps to wait. As

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he struggles against drowsiness, strange and extraordinarily vivid fantasies flit through his mind. He dozes but, hearing a man pass by, wakes and inquires, with unwarranted peevishness, if he must wait there all night for his kinsman, Major Molineux. The stranger approaches and, seeing a country youth who is apparently homeless and without friends, offers to be of help. After hearing Robin's story he joins him to wait the arrival of the Major.

Shortly a mighty stream of people come into view. Robin gradually makes out that some of them are applauding spectators, some participants in a curious procession. It is headed by a single horseman, who bears a drawn sword and whose face is painted red and black: he is the man who has told Robin that his kinsman would pass that way within the hour. Behind the horseman come a band of wind instruments, men carrying torches, and then men in Indian and many other kinds of costume.

Robin has a feeling that he is involved in this procession, a feeling which is quickly confirmed. As the torches approach him, the leader thunders a command, the parade stops, the tumult dies down.

Right before Robin's eye was an uncovered cart. There the torches blazed the brightest, there the moon shone out like day, and there, in tar-and-feathery dignity, sat his kinsman, Major Molineux!

The Major is a large and majestic man, but now his body is "agitated by a quick and continual tremor" he cannot quell. The encounter with Robin causes him to suffer still more deeply. He recognizes the youth on the instant.

Staring at his kinsman, Robin's knees shake and his hair bristles. Soon, however, a curious change sets in. The adventures of the night, his fatigue, the confusion of the spectacle, above all "the spectre of his kinsman reviled by that great multitude . . . [affect] him with a sort of mental inebriety." In the crowd he sees the watchman he has encountered earlier, enjoying his amazement. A woman twitches his arm: it is the minx of the scarlet petticoat. Finally, from the balcony of the large house across from the church comes a great, broad laugh which momentarily dominates everything: it is the formidable old man of whom Robin made his first inquiries and whom he later went out of his way to avoid.

Then Robin seemed to hear the voices of . . . all who had made

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sport of him that night. The contagion was spreading among the multitude, when all at once, it seized upon Robin, and he sent forth a shout of laughter that echoed through the street,—every man shook his sides, every man emptied his lungs, but Robin's shout was the loudest there.

When the laughter has momentarily spent its force, the procession is resumed. Robin asks the gentleman who has been sitting beside him to direct him to the ferry. The Major, the boy realizes, will scarcely desire to see his face again. In the friendliest possible way the gentleman refuses Robin's request. He tells the youth that he will speed him on his journey in a few days if he still wants to leave. But he suggests another possibility. " '. . . if you prefer to remain with us, perhaps, as you are a shrewd youth, you may rise in the world without the help of your kinsman, Major Molineux.' "

II

"My Kinsman, Major Molineux" belongs, I believe, among Hawthorne's half-dozen greatest short stories. But unexpected difficulties arise when one attempts to account for the spell the story casts. Although it seems clear enough as it is read, it resists analysis. Above all, its climax is puzzling. "Mental inebriety" is hardly an adequate explanation for a youth's bare-faced mockery of an elderly relative for whom he had been searching, whose ill-treatment might have been expected to inspire feelings of compassion and anger.

Of the half-dozen critics who have discussed the story, surprisingly, no more than two seem aware that it presents any difficulties. The rest accept Hawthorne's explanation at face value. They regard "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" as the story of an ignorant country youth who, happening to wander upon the scene at an inopportune time, is first frustrated in his search as a result of the preparation the colonists are making and then becomes a reluctant and confused spectator at their humiliation of his kinsman. Such an interpretation not only fails to explain many aspects of the story; it hardly suggests why the story should interest us. It is perhaps significant that the critics who recognize that the story is by no means so one-dimensional as this, Malcolm Cowley and Q. D. Leavis, also show the keenest awareness of its greatness. Unfortunately even these critics have not succeeded, in my opinion, in penetrating to the story's richest veins of meaning.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Malcolm Cowley describes the story as "the legend of a youth who achieves manhood through searching for a spiritual father and finding that the object of his search is an imposter" (Introduction to *The Portable Hawthorne*). Leaving to one side the question of whether Robin is searching for a spiritual father, it may be said at once that there is no evidence that Major Molineux is an imposter. The first paragraph of the story tells us that the colonial servants appointed by Great Britain were likely to be resented even when they carried out instructions with some lenience; and we are later told that the Major's head had "grown gray in honor."

Mrs. Leavis regards "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" as a "prophetic forecast of . . . the rejection of England that was to occur in fact much later" ("Hawthorne as Poet," *Sewanee Review,* Spring 1951). This is by no means as far-fetched a reading of the story as it may at first appear. It has the merit of calling attention to a rebelliousness in Robin for which, as we shall see, there is a great deal of evidence. But as I think will become clear, Mrs. Leavis has perceived a secondary implication of that rebelliousness; it has a much more intimate source and reference.

The remaining critics who have commented on "Major Molineux" have evidently based their remarks almost entirely on their conscious reactions to the story's manifest level of meaning. At best, I believe, such criticism is of limited value; in connection with such a work as this it is sometimes actually misleading. Like some other stories by Hawthorne and by such writers as Melville, Kafka, Dostoevsky and Shakespeare, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" is Janus-faced. It says one thing to the conscious mind and whispers something quite different to the unconscious. The second level of meaning is *understood* readily enough, immediately and intuitively. Our acceptance of Robin's behavior—which, as we shall see, is bizarre not only during his ultimate encounter with his kinsman but throughout the story—is only explicable, I believe, on the assumption that we understand it without difficulty. To respond to the story, to find Robin's behavior not only "right" but satisfying, we must perceive a great many things nowhere explicitly developed. These hidden implications are not meant to come to our attention as we read; they would arouse anxiety if they did. Even to get at them after one has read the story requires a deliberate exertion of will. There is still

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

another difficulty. To deal with these implications at all systematically, one is almost compelled to make some use of depth-psychology. This is a kind of knowledge most critics are curiously loathe to employ.

As soon as we look at "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" more closely, we discover that it is only in part a story of baffled search: Robin is never so intent on finding his illustrious relative as he believes he is and as it appears. The story even tells us why this is so. To some extent we understand from the very beginning; the explanations offered serve basically to remind us of things we have experienced ourselves.

As Robin walks into the town, it will be remembered, he realizes that he should have probably asked the ferryman how to get to the home of Major Molineux. Today we have scientific evidence for what Hawthorne, and we, understand intuitively, the significance of such forgetting. Earlier in the same paragraph we have been told something equally significant. Robin walks into the town "with as light a step as if his day's journey had not already exceeded thirty miles, and with as eager an eye as if he were entering London city, instead of the little metropolis of a New England colony." This though he has momentarily lost sight of the reason for his visit! As early as this we begin to suspect that the town attracts the youth for reasons which have nothing whatever to do with finding his influential relative. The intimation does not surprise us. Robin is eighteen. The ferryman has surmised that this is his first visit to town. In a general way we understand why his eye is "eager."

Robin makes his first inquiry for his kinsman with reasonable alacrity. But a considerable time appears to elapse before his second inquiry, at the tavern, and he is evidently spurred to enter it as much by the odor of food, which reminds him of his own hunger, as by any zeal to find the Major.

After his rebuff at the tavern it perhaps seems reasonable enough that Robin should drop his inquiries and simply walk through the streets looking for Major Molineux. If our critical faculties were not already somewhat relaxed, however, it might occur to us at once that this is a singularly inefficient way of looking for anyone. And Robin does not pursue his impractical plan with any ardor. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stares at the young men he encounters with as much interest as at the old ones; though he notices the jaunty gait of others, he never increases his pace; and there are many pauses "to examine the gorgeous display of goods in the shop windows."

Nor does his lack of success make him impatient. Only the approach of the elderly gentleman he had first accosted causes him to abandon his plan and turn down a side street. He is now so tired and hungry that he *considers* demanding guidance from the first solitary passerby he encounters. But while this resolution is, as Hawthorne puts it, "gaining strength," what he actually does is enter "a street of mean appearance, on either side of which a row of ill-built houses was straggling toward the harbor." It is of the utmost importance that Robin continues his "researches" on this less respectable street, although no one is visible along its entire extent. If we were not by now so completely immersed in the concealed story which is unfolding itself, we might begin to wonder consciously whether Robin is seriously searching for his kinsman.

The encounters with women which follow explain the attraction of the street. They show that unconsciously Robin is searching for sexual adventure. The strength of his desire is almost pathetically betrayed by his half-willingness to believe the cock-and-bull story of the pretty young "housekeeper." Here, if not before, we identify one of the specific forces which is inhibiting Robin in his search for his kinsman: he would like a greater measure of sexual freedom than it is reasonable to suppose he would enjoy in the home of a colonial official.

The encounter with the watchman furnishes additional evidence of Robin's ambivalence. The youth could scarcely hope to find a better person of whom to ask directions. It is likely that he is also held back in this case by guilt about what he has just been doing, but the ease with which he has permitted himself to be diverted from his search is probably one of the sources of that guilt.

After further wandering Robin finally detains the passerby who tells him that the Major will pass that very spot within the hour. In talking with the kindly gentleman who joins him to await the arrival of the Major, Robin is unable to restrain himself from boasting of his shrewdness and grown-upness. These boasts help us to understand another of the forces which has been holding him back: he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wants to succeed through his own efforts and his own merit. His departure from home has evidently caused him to dream of achieving economic as well as sexual independence. When at the end of the story the gentleman suggests that Robin may decide to stay in town and may prosper without the help of his kinsman, he is simply giving expression to the youth's unvoiced but readily discernible desire.

The gentleman has an opportunity to observe how half-hearted Robin is about finding his kinsman. When the sounds of the approaching procession become more clearly audible, the youth comes to the conclusion that some kind of "prodigious merry-making" is going forward and suggests that he and his new-found friend step around the corner, to a point where he thinks everyone is hastening, and partake of their share of the fun. He has to be reminded by his companion that he is searching for his kinsman, who is supposed to pass by the place where they now are in a very short time. With insight and artistry Hawthorne spreads the evidence of Robin's irresoluteness of purpose from the very beginning of the story to the moment of Major Molineux's appearance; but so subtle is the evidence, so smoothly does it fit into the surface flow of the narrative, that its significance never obtrudes itself on our attention.

By this point in the story, furthermore, we unconsciously understand Robin's vacillation more completely than I have been able to suggest. We see that, unbeknown to himself, the youth has good reasons for *not* wanting to find Major Molineux: when he finds him, he will have to re-submit to the kind of authority from which, temporarily at least, he has just escaped. At some deep level the Major appears anything but a potential benefactor; he symbolizes just those aspects of the father from which the youth so urgently desires to be free. As an elderly relative of the father and an authority figure, he may be confused with the father. In any case, however undeservedly, he has now become the target of all the hostile and rebellious feelings which were originally directed against the father.

Hawthorne tells us these things, it is interesting to note, by means of just the kind of unconscious manifestations which twentieth-century psychology has found so significant. While Robin sits on the steps of the church, fighting his desire to sleep, he has a fantasy in which he imagines that his kinsman is already dead! And his very next thought is of his father's household. He wonders how "that evening

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of ambiguity and weariness" has been spent at home, and has a second fantasy of such hallucinatory vividness that he wonders if he is "here or there." Nor is this an idle question. His father and Major Molineux are so inextricably linked in his mind that in a sense the drama in which he is involved is being played out "there"—at home —as well as in the town where bodily he happens to be.

The climax of this drama, so puzzling to the conscious intellect, is immediately comprehensible to that portion of the mind which has been following the hidden course of developments. It is comprehensible although Hawthorne describes Robin's feelings, as is right, in vague terms. Robin never understands those feelings and the reader would find it disturbing if they were too plainly labelled.

The feelings would probably never have secured open expression except under circumstances as out of the ordinary as those the story describes. But now everything conspires not simply to permit but to encourage Robin to give in to tendencies which as we know he was finding it difficult to control. To everyone present Major Molineux is overtly what he is to the youth on some dark and secret level—a symbol of restraint and unwelcome authority. He is this even to the elderly gentleman, the watchman, the man by his side—people whose disapproval of the crowd's behavior might have had a powerful effect upon him. Without a voice being raised in protest, the crowd is acting out the youth's repressed impulses and in effect urging him to act on them also. The joy the crowd takes in asserting its strength and the reappearance of the lady of the scarlet petticoat provide him with incentives for letting himself go.

And so Robin makes common cause with the crowd. He laughs —he laughs louder than anyone else. So long as he himself did not know how he would act he had reason to fear the crowd, and the relief he feels at the easing of the immediate situation is one of the sources of his laughter. But his decision resolves still deeper and more vexing conflicts. The relief he feels that he can vent his hostility for his kinsman and abandon his search for him is the ultimate source of his "riotous mirth." It is fueled by energy which until then was being expended in repression and inner conflict.

Although Hawthorne uses figurative language which may keep his meaning from being consciously noted, he is at pains to let us know that murderous hate underlies the merriment of the crowd of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which Robin becomes a part. When the laughter momentarily dies down, the procession resumes its march.

On they went, like fiends that throng in mockery around some dead potentate, mighty no more, but majestic still in his agony. On they went, in counterfeited pomp, in senseless uproar, in frenzied merriment, trampling all on an old man's heart.

Symbolically and to some extent actually the crowd has carried out the fantasy Robin had on the steps of the church.

To the conscious mind "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" is a story of an ambitious youth's thwarted search for an influential relative he wants to find. To the unconscious, it is a story of the youth's hostile and rebellious feelings for the relative—and for the father—and his wish to be free of adult domination. To the conscious mind it is a story of a search which was unsuccessful because of external difficulties. To the unconscious—like *Hamlet,* with which it has more than one point in common—it is a story of a young man caught up in an enterprise for which he has no stomach and debarred from succeeding in it by internal inhibitions.

From one point of view the unacknowledged forces playing upon the apparently simple and candid central character of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" are deeply abhorrent. Our sympathy for the character should tell us, however, that there is another side to the matter. The tendencies which assert themselves in Robin exist in all men. What he is doing, unwittingly but flamboyantly, is something which every young man does and must do, however gradually, prudently and inconspicuously: he is destroying an image of paternal authority so that, freed from its restraining influence, he can begin life as an adult.

III

"My Kinsman, Major Molineux" is one of a relatively small but distinguished group of stories which would be incomprehensible, in part or in their entirety, on the basis of what we understand consciously. In response to such stories it is evident that unconscious perception plays an indispensable role. Though it is less evident, I believe that the unconscious plays a role which is scarcely less important in response to many stories which are intelligible on some level to the conscious mind. For most, if not all fiction—and certainly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the greatest fiction—has *additional* levels of meaning which must be communicated unconsciously. In many cases far more is communicated unconsciously than consciously. Even when this is not the case, the meanings grasped below the threshold of awareness may make a disproportionate contribution to the pleasure we receive from reading fiction.

It may be worth while to analyze a story which is perfectly comprehensible to the intellect but has many further levels of meaning. Let us glance, therefore, at Sherwood Anderson's story, "I Want to Know Why." It has many interesting points of similarity and contrast with "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." And as it happens, the story has been analyzed by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, so that once again we have a jumping-off point for our own explorations.

I shall assume that my readers are familiar with the story, and simply remind them of its chief events. It is narrated in the first person by its fifteen-year-old hero, whose name we never learn. A boy from Beckersville, Kentucky, a small town evidently in the blue-grass region, he is "crazy about thoroughbred horses"; to him they epitomize everything which is "lovely and clean and full of spunk and honest." A lump comes into his throat when he sees potential winners run. He knows he could capitalize on this physical reaction if he wanted to, but he has no desire to gamble; horses and racing represent something too important to him for that.

With three friends of about his own age, the boy runs away to attend the races at Saratoga. Bildad, a Negro from the same town who works at the tracks, feeds the boys, shows them a place to sleep and keeps still about them, which the hero seems to appreciate most of all.

The race the boys particularly want to see has two entries that give the hero a lump in his throat, and the night before it is run he is so excited he cannot sleep. He aches to watch the two horses run, but he dreads it too, for he hates to see either one beaten. The day of the race he goes to the paddocks to look at the horses. As soon as he sees one of them, Sunstreak, a nervous and beautiful stallion, who is "like a girl you think about sometimes but never see," the boy knows that it is his day. Watching, he experiences a mystical communion with the horse and the horse's trainer, a man named Jerry

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tillford, also from Beckersville, who has befriended him many times. The experience is so central to understanding the story that it must be quoted at considerable length.

I was standing looking at that horse and aching. In some way, I can't tell how, I knew just how Sunstreak felt inside. . . . That horse wasn't thinking about running. . . . He was just thinking about holding himself back 'til the time for the running came. . . . He wasn't bragging or letting on much or prancing or making a fuss, but just waiting. I knew it and Jerry Tillford his trainer knew. I looked up and then that man and I looked into each other's eyes. Something happened to me. I guess I loved the man as much as I did the horse because he knew what I knew. Seemed to me there wasn't anything in the world but that man and the horse and me. I cried and Jerry Tillford had a shine in his eyes. . . .

Sunstreak does win the race and the other Beckersville entry, a gelding named Middlestride, finishes second. The hero of the story was so confident that it would work out this way that he is scarcely excited. All through the race he thinks about Jerry Tillford and of how happy he must be. "I liked him that afternoon even more than I ever liked my own father." Jerry, he knows, has worked with Sunstreak since the horse was a baby colt, and he imagines that while watching the race the trainer must feel "like a mother seeing her child do something brave or wonderful."

That night the boy "cuts out" from his companions because he feels an impulse to be near Jerry. He walks along a road which leads to a "rummy-looking farmhouse" because he has seen "Jerry and some other men go that way in an automobile." He doesn't expect to find them, but shortly after he gets there an automobile arrives with Jerry and five other men, several of them from Beckersville and known to the boy. All of them except the father of one of the boys who has accompanied the hero to Saratoga, a gambler named Rieback who quarrels with the others, enter the farmhouse, which proves to be "a place for bad women to stay in."

The boy telling the story creeps to a window and peers in. What he sees sickens and disgusts him. The women are mean-looking and, except for one who a little resembles the gelding Middlestride, "but [is] not clean like him" and has "a hard ugly mouth," they are not even attractive. The place smells rotten, and the talk is rotten, "the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kind a kid hears around a livery stable in a town like Beckersville in the winter but don't ever expect to hear talked when there are women around."

Jerry Tillford boasts like a fool, taking credit for Sunstreak's qualities and the victory the horse has won that afternoon. Then the trainer looks at the woman who somewhat resembles Middlestride and his eyes begin to shine as they had when he had looked at the teller of the story and Sunstreak that afternoon. As the man weaves toward the woman, the boy begins to hate him. "I wanted to scream and rush in the room and kill him . . . I was so mad . . . that I cried and my fists were doubled up so my fingernails cut my hands." When the man kisses the woman, the boy creeps away and returns to the tracks. That night he sleeps little. He tells his companions nothing of what he has seen, but the next morning he persuades them to start for home.

There he continues to live very much as before, but everything seems different.

At the tracks the air don't taste as good or smell as good. It's because a man like Jerry Tillford, who knows what he does, could see a horse like Sunstreak run, and kiss a woman like that the same day. . . . I keep thinking about it and it spoils looking at horses and smelling things and hearing niggers laugh and everything. Sometimes I'm so mad about it I want to fight someone. . . . What did he do it for? I want to know why.

IV

"I Want to Know Why" certainly means something to the conscious intellect, and in *Understanding Fiction* Brooks and Warren give one interpretation of the story's manifest content to which I should not wish to offer more than one or two reservations. "I Want to Know Why," they declare, is an initiation story in which a boy "discovers something about the nature of evil, and tries to find some way of coming to terms with his discovery."

The boy knows that evil exists in the world. According to Brooks and Warren, what causes him to feel so much horror and disgust at Saratoga is the realization—pointed up by the parallelism of the scene at the paddocks and the scene at the rummy-looking farm-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

house—that good and evil may be so closely linked, that they may co-exist in the same person. He discovers too that virtue is a human, not an animal, quality. Unlike the horse, with which in other respects human beings are frequently compared, man has the capacity for choice. When he elects the bad, he is worse than the beasts.

It seems to me that the phrase "who knows what he does," on which Brooks and Warren base the last-mentioned observation, refers less to specific problems involving choice than to the willingness of a creature like man to come to terms with his predilection for evil. Nor can I assent to the claim that the boy *discovers,* at the climax of the story, that good and evil are closely joined. What he knows about Henry Rieback's father has already taught him that, if nothing else has. These are trifling qualifications, however. My real question is whether the interpretation offered by Brooks and Warren goes far to explain the impact of the story, even assuming the correctness of everything they say. They themselves seem a little uneasy on this score, for they write:

> . . . having extracted what may seem to be a moral 'message,' one should remind oneself that the 'message' is, as such, not the story. The story may be said to be the dramatization of the discovery. Now the message is something of which everyone is aware; it is a platitude. But the platitude ceases to be a platitude, it is revitalized and becomes meaningful again, when it is shown to be operating in terms of experience.

Here, again, there is little to which one can take exception. A very ordinary idea or event can be "revitalized" if dramatized successfully, and the fact that what we learn about Jerry Tillford is dramatized helps to account for its impact upon the boy at the farmhouse window and the reader looking over his shoulder. Even when dramatized, however, the knowledge that an adult is capable of good and evil is unlikely to have the powerful effect it has upon narrator and reader unless it has some special significance. Something about the nature of the narrator's relationship and experience with Jerry Tillford has eluded Brooks' and Warren's analysis. It has eluded it, I believe, in part because they are so preoccupied with the moral values of the story that they have not asked the most important questions which must be answered if we are to account for the story's appeal.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A central question, as I have indicated, is why the climactic scene can arouse such pain, disgust and bitter disillusionment in the boy who tells the story. His discovery of the underside of Jerry Tillford evidently frustrates some yearning he can scarcely bear to renounce. Once we have gone this far, it is not too difficult to identify this yearning: it is for an ideal relationship with a man who is like his father but better than his father—less fallible, more sympathetic with the boy's interests and, what is at first glance a curious requirement, devoid of sexuality. His disappointment is the keener because, on the very afternoon of the experience at the farmhouse, the consummation of his desire seemed within reach—for an ecstatic moment had actually been achieved.

That the unnamed narrator of "I Want to Know Why" wanted to adopt Jerry Tillford as a kind of second father could not be more clear. Indeed, it could be maintained that the boy's feelings are sometimes too baldly revealed. They could be inferred from the few things he says about his father and various incidental remarks about the trainer. His father is "all right," and evidently extremely permissive but he doesn't make much money and so can't buy his son things. The boy says he doesn't care—he's too old for that—but since he has just listed the kind of presents Henry Rieback is always getting from his father we doubt his statement. At a deeper level, we sense, the boy is disappointed because his father does not satisfy an immaterial need: he evidently does not share his son's interest in thoroughbreds and racing. Jerry Tillford, of course, is not only interested in these subjects but an authority upon them, and his job puts him in a position to befriend the boy in terms of his interests. He has let the boy walk right into the stalls to examine horses, and so on. These favors may have made the boy think of Jerry Tillford as a kind of father. In any case, the language the boy uses to describe the trainer's treatment of Sunstreak shows that he attributes parental kindliness to him. ("I knew he had been watching and working with Sunstreak since the horse was a baby colt . . . I knew that for him it was like a mother seeing her child do something brave or wonderful.")

The various hints given us about the narrator's feelings for Jerry Tillford are confirmed by two explicit statements. The boy declares, it will be remembered, that on the afternoon of the race he liked the trainer even more than he ever liked his own father. He is equally frank about the feelings which prompted him to "ditch" his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

companions the night of the race in order to be near the trainer. "I was just lonesome to see Jerry, like wanting to see your father at night when you are a young kid."

What may require further explanation—although unconsciously we understand it very well—is why the boy's feelings are of such extraordinary strength and take the particular form they do. In part his hero worship of Jerry Tillford is a not uncommon outcome of an interrelated cluster of reactions to the parents which arise in children of both sexes during latency and early adolescence. The fuller knowledge of reality children acquire at this stage of their development and the resentment they feel for rebuffs, imaginary or real, may cause them to become acutely aware of their parents' circumstances and limitations. Though they continue to love their parents, consciously or unconsciously they are likely to feel dissatisfied with them or even ashamed of them. Frequently these feelings cause children to replace their parents in fantasy—to imagine that their actual parents are mere pretenders to that honor and that their "real" parents are personages who are powerful, famous or wealthy, or the possessors of some other desired attribute. The children's disaffection may also impel them to establish relationships with adults who can easily be recognized as idealized replacements of one or the other parent.

In boys these feelings are powerfully reinforced by the changes which occur at puberty. The sudden upsurge of sexuality may reactivate the long-dormant Oedipus tendencies, jeopardizing and in some cases at least temporarily upsetting the still far from stable identification with the father. The wish to protect this identification against the reawakened competitiveness which threatens it is responsible for a curious secondary development—an attempt to deny the sexuality of the father and, by an inevitable chain of association, of the mother also. Misguided as such an attempt may appear, it has its own logic. Seen as a sexual being enjoying the favors of the mother, the father again becomes a person who arouses envy, hatred and fear. The knowledge of the sexual relations of the parents is inherently painful and, as Freud has explained, is usually conveyed to the child in a way which tends to belittle both his parents and himself. For this reason, too, the information is usually resisted.

The secret of sexual life is revealed to [the growing boy] in coarse

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

language, undisguisedly derogatory and hostile in intent, and the effect is to destroy the authority of adults, which is irreconcilable with these revelations about their sexual activities. The greatest impression on the child who is being initiated is made by the relation the information bears to his own parents, which is often instantly repudiated in some such words as these: "It may be true that your father and mother and other people do such things, but it is quite impossible that mine do." ("A Special Type of Choices of Object Made by Men.")

Now we are in a better position to approach the two contrasted scenes which do so much to make "I Want to [illegible] pelling story. The scene at the paddocks depicts a fervently desired communion with an idealized and desexualized father, a father toward whom one need have no feelings of competitiveness and hostility. Moreover, it recalls just such a situation of innocence—it recalls the pre-oedipal situation in which the feeling of father and son for the mother was a bond between them instead of the focus of rivalry, and father, mother and child were united in love. In this scene Sunstreak becomes the mother, and the boy and Jerry Tillford are brought together by their admiration and love for the stallion. (Sunstreak reminds the boy, it will be recalled, of "a girl you think about sometimes but never see.")

The scene at the rummy-looking farmhouse undoes the scene at the paddocks. Jerry's bragging, which is at the expense of Sunstreak, reveals that he has no real love for the stallion, and thus shows the boy that there was actually no foundation for the experience he thought he had had that afternoon. Because the boy identifies with the stallion, the trainer's boasts are also a blow to his self-esteem. Finally, the boasts show how unfit the trainer is to be the kind of parent the boy had desired.

The disclosure of Jerry's sexuality wounds the boy still more deeply. Even more than his bragging, it disqualifies the trainer for the kind of relationship the boy had desired—a relationship which would be washed of all competitiveness and enmity. It is the source of a more encompassing disillusionment. It forces on the boy the unwelcome knowledge that this is a sexual, sinful world, in which he can nowhere hope to find the kind of communion he has sought or the perfection he once attributed to the parents and later hoped to find incarnated in others. The trainer's behavior, his very presence

(a) Melba — Peter — Prospero — Gemma — The sin is the subordination of spirit to the world, the flesh and the devil, that is the falsification of the true creative [illegible]

LICENSED TO JINZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at the whorehouse, is also a particularly brutal and painful reminder of the sexuality of the parents—not only of the father, with whom Tillford is immediately associated, but of the mother as well. She is present in this scene also. She is the woman the trainer desires, the one, somewhat more attractive than the others, who resembles the gelding Middlestride. She is debased to a prostitute, a devaluation which almost always suggests itself—though of course it may be instantly repudiated—when an adolescent boy is compelled to take cognizance of the sexual relations of the parents. Freud describes the chain of reasoning in the same essay from which I have just quoted:

> Along with this piece of 'sexual enlightenment' there seldom fails to go, as a corollary, a further one about the existence of certain women who practice sexual intercourse as a means of livelihood and are universally despised in consequence. To the boy himself this contempt is necessarily quite foreign; as soon as he realizes that he too can be initiated by these unfortunates into that sexual life which he has hitherto regarded as the exclusive prerogative of 'grown-ups,' his feeling for them is only a mixture of longing and shuddering. Then, when he cannot any longer maintain the doubt that claims exception for his own parents from the ugly sexual behavior of the rest of the world, he says to himself with cynical logic that the difference between his mother and a whore is after all not so very great, since at bottom they both do the same thing.

On one level Jerry Tillford's behavior is wounding because it punctures an attempt to idealize him, to deny his sexuality and the parents'. On still another level it is wounding because it has the character of a sexual rejection and betrayal. To some extent the boy's feelings are those of an outraged lover. Logically the two sets of reactions are incompatible with one another, but here, as is frequently the case, fiction is speaking to a part of the psyche not concerned with logic, a part which can simultaneously accommodate divergent and even contradictory feelings.

The scene at the farmhouse gains additional poignance by stirring feelings originally experienced at different periods of time. Like the scene at the paddocks, it recalls an earlier situation heavily charged with emotion: it condenses the infantile and the adolescent discoveries of sexuality. On the immediate, realistic level the scene depicts something which befalls a fifteen-year-old boy, but in every essential

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

respect it duplicates the "primal scene," the original investigation of the parents' sexual relations. The looking, the secrecy, the mixture of fascination and horror, the ambivalence about whether one will "find anything," the feeling of being alone and betrayed when one does find what underneath one did expect—all the characteristics of the prototype experience are echoed here.

Although only the unconscious is likely to perceive it, in the last analysis both "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and "I Want to Know Why" are stories of a boy's relationship with his father. Both describe more or less universal phases of the process of growing up, although, as in great fiction generally, the actual events are so altered that they may not be consciously recognizable, and so telescoped and heightened that they arouse even profounder affects than the less dramatic and more gradual experiences they draw upon and evoke. "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" concentrates on the young man's rebellious and hostile feelings toward an authoritative image of the father—an image which must be destroyed in the course of achieving independent adulthood. "I Want to Know Why" describes the frustration of two dear but unfulfillable wishes of the adolescent boy. The first wish is to deny the sexuality of the parents in order to avoid competition with the father. This wish is incompatible with what one inevitably learns in growing up and on some deep level already knows. The second wish is for a love relationship with the father which, though idealized in some respects, is still so heavily cathected with libido that its satisfaction would involve both continued dependence upon the father and a proprietary right to his affection.

Although both stories refer ultimately to emotions felt by sons for their fathers, it is interesting that in each case the feelings are displaced onto surrogates. In "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" the advantage of the alteration is evident: it facilitates the expression of hostility. "I Want to Know Why" is probably both more realistic and more moving because the immediate object of the hero's feelings is just such a man as Jerry Tillford. By the time a boy is fifteen the feelings of affection for the actual father are usually too admixed with other elements, the disillusionment too advanced, to permit the sharp contrasts of hopes raised and abruptly deflated upon which the structure and impact of the story depend.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

R. W. Flint

THE LIVING WHITMAN

Anniversary or no anniversary, Whitman is being written about with eloquence and a sense of discovery. Randall Jarrell's "Some Lines from Whitman"[1] is a landmark by which to measure the others, although Richard Chase's more discursive and consecutive but no less valuable book[2] was "well advanced" before Jarrell appeared, to pour smoking brimstone on the heads of the fainthearted. Messrs. Cowley and Arvin had written well of Whitman, but often with a needlessly apologetic and even a rather finicking air about the poetry itself. Between Emerson and Arvin rise the impassible hills of polemic and ideology. But even so, *even so*—Eliot and Winters and the "problem" of Hart Crane, who busied a covey of critics in saving him from himself and hence from Whitman, notwithstanding—it is hard to think of Whitman as having been really lost. We think of Turgenev's abortive plan, doubtless under pressure from James, to translate his poems. We recall Laforgue's translations, and those striking tributes from Hopkins and Yeats.[3] Whatever the actual filiations may be, it is no less hard to imagine, among others. *The Waste Land, The Cantos* or Roethke's "The Shape of the Fire" as not owing their lives, in some way or ways, to *Leaves of Grass,* that first great phantasmagoria of the self in modern poetry.

Of all great poetry, Whitman's is probably the least detachable from its philosophical program, the poetry that comes closest to being, literally, its own program; so that to sift the greater philosophy from the lesser, you have only to choose the best poems. But in that "only" lies an hundred years' war of unparallelled confusion, a Balzacian comedy of voices from which we can pick at random an Edgar Lee Masters objecting to Whitman's use of "breasts" on grounds of decorum! The two

1 In *Poetry and the Age,* now in a Vintage paperbacked edition.

2 *Walt Whitman Reconsidered,* by Richard Chase (Sloane, $3.75).

3 Cited by Leslie Fiedler, in *Leaves of Grass One Hundred Years After,* edited by Milton Hindus, with essays by William Carlos Williams, Richard Chase, Leslie Fiedler, Kenneth Burke, David Daiches and J. Middleton Murry (Stanford University Press, $5.00). All subsequent references to these writers refer to essays in this book.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

late elegies seemed to be, all too obviously at first, touchstones of the "mature" Whitman. The great achievement of Jarrell and Chase is to have righted the balance in favor of the earlier poems but not at the expense of the later.

Of the ideologizing efforts of Messrs. Hindus, Murry and Allen[4] I'm afraid the less said the better. Murry employs the word Democracy and its cognates some forty and more times; Hindus, were he not master of ceremonies, sounds as though he would dearly like to follow suit. This is no time to be cynical about such important matters, nor to imply that Whitman's homosexual streak somehow ruins his democratic idealism. I agree entirely with Mr. Chase that we can't "finally" have the poet without the prophet nor the substance of Whitman without most of the spirit. He is indeed "the supreme poet of American optimism and pragmatism, the rhapsodist of our material and spiritual resources, the unabashed celebrant of the self at home in an open, dynamic universe." He often convinces when he doesn't persuade, offers us a memorable phrase or line or episode to treasure against the time he falls into bathos. But to judge Whitman's poetry according to how well it illustrates a philosophy or even a poetic method—this lands us, in Mr. Allen's book, not with the poems that every reader instinctively feels to be great, but with "Passage to India" and "Salut au Monde!" Mr. Daiches agrees that "None of Whitman's poems repays a careful analysis of its structure more than 'Passage to India.'" Thus do the great bronze doors, so ponderous and so hard to set in motion, catch only the dragon's tail. Kenneth Burke, at roughly this point, takes the creature in hand and plies his linguistic scalpels with great thoroughness and fervor to see if *some* sort of "overarching" idea-scheme, *some* rhetorical ground-plan, *some* kind of subtle symbolic play can't be isolated without playing favorites among the poems. My impression, alas, is that he honorably fails, that his essay is of an exemplary dullness and random implausibility—a dilution instead of the longed-for revelation. Somewhere in the background, to be sure, we glimpse the famous problem of the One and the Many; we watch the dialectical counter-weights rise and fall; we note the devices of expansion, amplification and merger; we may even welcome a new bridge between East and West in Whitman's mystical reverence for everyday life. All well and good. But the fact of the matter seems to be that the redoubtable topical-rhetorical-symbolic approach grinds to a halt well short of any interesting or worthwhile goal. Either the symbolic structure, as in the elegies, is so overt that any schoolboy could trace it as well as Empson, or else there just isn't any organized

4 *The Solitary Singer,* by Gay Wilson Allen (Macmillan, $8.00).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"music of concepts" of the sort that Knight and Spurgeon have found in Shakespeare. The lilac, the bird and the star are images or portents, but are they symbols? except in the minimal sense of symbolizing the poet and his poem? The essence of Whitman's art, after all, at least in "Song of Myself," is a continual interchange of roles between the Self and the World. When Ahab becomes the Whale, and the Whale Ahab, where *then* is the symbolism? The dramatic organization of "Song of Myself" is as primitive as one could well imagine. This wonderful, uneven poem may swallow us up on our first reading and perhaps on our fifth, but its very nakedness is surely its great virtue as well as its surprising difficulty, leaving nothing between us and the perception (or non-perception) that Whitman, in Jarrell's words, "is a poet of the greatest and oddest delicacy and originality and sensitivity, so far as words are concerned." And poems, as someone reminded somebody (in Paris!), are made of words.

We must conclude that the harpoons of the newer criticisms seem not to sink very far; but neither are we able, as once seemed possible, to draw Leviathan out with an hook. The irony and ambiguity are there, but diffused in a sort of psycho-drama, deployed by phrase, sentence and episode rather than by verbal compression and allusion. The subtlety and variety of texture are also there, as irregularly as possible, in a fabric so loose and erratic that one can only point to *generally* superior poems, "Song of Myself," "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "Song of the Open Road," "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life," etc., poems in which the pressure of feeling and perception is strongest. Mr. Cowley is probably right in claiming three main pulses in Whitman's art—1855-1856 with the first edition, 1859-60 with *Calamus* and "Out of the Cradle . . .," and 1865-73 with "When Lilacs Last. . . ."; but if I learned anything while preparing for this review, it is the necessity of submitting to the often irksome chore of reading all the poems, of letting yourself *be* buttonholed and generally blown about by the rougher winds of Whitmanian prophecy. I found myself reaching, first, a stage of numbness, and finally a stage of more or less indiscriminate enjoyment. Whitman had a most genial way of taking the sting out of his preachments, of shifting his weight sheepishly onto the wrong foot at the critical moment; and this is something you have to "get" as you "get" a new and strange piece of music. "O culpable! I acknowledge! I exposé!" Peculiar certainly, and embarrassing as such things may be at first, after a while they begin to look like the workings of an unconscious wit, a delightful *nolo contendere* aimed specifically at Emerson. If Chase is right, as I'm sure he is, that Whitman is among other things a "comic poet," then

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his comedy is a more pervasive affair than his deliberate feints, jokes and evasions; is, in truth, a deep-running strain of instinctive self-appraisal.

What you appreciate as soon as you contemplate the atrocious jog-trot in which Emerson cast some of his most sublime meditations, is Whitman's phenomenal *luck*. He may have had his nerve, but more than that, he had his luck. Growing up with the last of the world cities; sublimely average in his appetites but far above average in his powers; never beyond walking distance of the country, river and seashore; temperamentally attuned to the most *recherché* of America's thinkers but far more plastically adaptable to ordinary life; in the Civil War but not of it; with plenty of opportunity to indulge his precariously innocent taste for young manhood; strongly innoculated with the huckstering virus but just as strongly protected from it by an immense indolence, delicacy and purity of feeling;—with all this in his favor, Whitman could hardly have missed finding that *sine qua non* of great poetry, namely, a new *rhythm*, a "natural" tempo and an accurate sense of stress. Compare Emerson's lines from "Compensation":

> *In changing moon and tidal wave*
> *Glows the feud of Want and Have.*
> *Gauge of more and less through space,*
> *Electric star or pencil plays,*
> *The lonely Earth amid the balls*
> *That hurry through the eternal halls . . .*

and so on, like Sophocles arranged for a German band, with Whitman's:

> *City of orgies, walks and joys,*
> *City whom that I have lived and sung in your midst will one day make you illustrious . . .*

A temptation follows from this seemingly naive metrical success to treat Whitman as a master of Free Verse who composes "by phrase" rather than by foot, line or stanza. Of all the heresies attached to Whitman, this may be the most dangerous, being just true enough to lead weaker heads astray. The ground-beat of his poetry grew steadily stronger, until, in poems like "Patrolling Barnegat" and "The Dalliance of the Eagles," you find the Whitman "form" in its abstract purity, a loose-jointed variation of the classical hexameter, gracefully monumental, a species of American Romanesque with the balance if not the precision we think of as neo-classical. But even though these homogeneous poems are rarely his best, Whitman is a strongly metered poet,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at least as "artificial" as the Psalmist; and the whole happy combination of thought, movement, feeling and meter is what, after all, makes Whitman one of the supreme masters of colloquial grace, a major link between Shakespearean blank verse and modern poetry.

The picture of Whitman as an American Orpheus, doomed to seek his visionary Eurydice in the inferno of Manhattan, the Civil War and his own chaotic soul, is greatly enhanced by the accumulated evidence of a miserable family life. One brother was a drunkard, married to a part-time harlot, and died at thirty-seven of tuberculosis; another was syphilitic and died in an insane asylum; another was an imbecile and epileptic. His favorite sister, Chase tells us, "became squalid, eccentric and unbalanced" and "was given to spells of drunkenness and paranoia." Whitman's early family life was marked by a kind of "moral and psychic squalor, anxiety, restlessness and vagrancy. . . ." This *exuberance* of misery makes Walt's relationship to his Van Velsor mother the more appealing, and his sublimation of the dangers of such a relationship the more remarkable. He could never have survived had he not been, in a most specific sense, the more motherly of the two: "neurotic, riven, and vividly paradoxical," of course; "the divided, multiple personality, a shifting amalgam of sycophancy and sloth, of mimetic brilliance and Dionysian inspiration, of calculating common sense and philosophic insight, of Rousseauistic disorientation and primitivism" (as Mr. Chase compares him to Rameau's Nephew), but *also,* and always, an extraordinarily self-contained physical being—fussy, hypochondriacal, sometimes even irascible in private with his closest friends, but able in public to grow steadily more like the imaginary Walt of *Leaves of Grass.* Only Turgenev and James among his contemporaries show this extreme combination of inward storm and outward calm. Like them, he became a prime actor in that comedy which the nineteenth century made of the olympian pretensions of Art. And like James, he connived in the fun.

Empson once wrote that when T. S. Eliot told a joke in his presence he was never sure whether to laugh or weep. Whitman's "comedy" is often of this perilous sort; viz., the time he described for two Washington newspapers a poetry reading by himself (about which several New York papers reported that scarcely anyone had heard a word he said): "His apostrophe to the Stars and Stripes which floated above him, describing them in far different scenes in battle, was most impassioned. Also his 'Away with War itself,' and his scornful 'Away with novels, plots and plays of foreign courts!' "

This is Malvolio speaking, not Falstaff. Sometimes the comedy went

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terribly wrong, and we can't really blame Bayard Taylor for writing a parody of this equivocal occasion. Whitman was surprisingly shy and inept as a public speaker. But Mr. Chase's sense of the comic Whitman is like the sense of Yeats you get from the hilarious preface to *A Vision,* of a poet who, if he can't actually turn every accident and absurdity to his own advantage, at least appears to be doing so when it counts the most.

A really definitive book on Whitman would be a monstrosity. In the Chase and Allen books we have the customary division between wisdom and industry, the former an amusing, affectionate, penetrating and beautifully organized short study, "an essay in 'appreciation' of the cultural-historical sort"; the latter a compendious biographical reference work of some 616 pages, with notes, appendices and index. Mr. Allen glows with reliability and an interminably aggressive honesty about Whitman's sexual life. As a critic, he seems terrified of his own shadow, to say nothing of Whitman's.

In several touching pronouncements toward the end of his life, Whitman admitted to a longing for the friendly opposition that Henry Clapp provided in the Pfaff's basement days, and which Richard Chase resumes in his book. "Michel Angelo invoked heaven's special protection against his friends and affectionate flatterers; palpable foes he could manage for himself." To take Whitman on Chase's discriminatingly generous terms is to believe in the "indestructible dignity" and "aura of wistful comedy" of the Camden years, the tragi-comedy sometimes, of a genuine but devious Old Master, still capable of bilking the martyred Mrs. Davis out of the largest part of her legacy, but also still capable of tears of gratitude on the gift of a pony, capable also of enjoying the "chippering shriek" of two kingfishers or the "*flup* of a pike leaping out and rippling the water."

Anyone who has read Malcolm Cowley's strangely heated introduction to the *Complete Whitman* (Garden City) of 1948 will be grateful to Chase for his temperate handling of the sexual question. He points out how little we really know, and how powerfully the evidence points to a total sublimation of Whitman's bi-sexual instincts. To insist as Cowley does on Whitman's kinship to the Baron de Charlus is to push matters beyond the point where they yield a return; for the striking thing about Whitman's behavior with Peter Doyle *et al.* is its openness and innocence, precisely its lack of the furtive freemasonry of Charlus and his friends. Whitman, after all, remained on very good—if somewhat abstract—terms with the bourgeois world to which he belonged

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heart and soul and which protected him from his weakness by letting him indulge it in the remote, chaste and harmlessly tactile manner of an honorary male nurse.

Back in the Roosevelt era, Newton Arvin rejected what he called "the sicklier and softer moments of his later verse"; but Leslie Fiedler, terribly wise in the folly of the Left, avows that "It is utterly misleading to imagine Whitman as a populist plein-air poet; for at his best he is a singer of urban life, like Baudelaire. . . . It is not to the life-affirmer we are returning, but to the elegiac Whitman, the poet of death." Well . . . yes and no. "Plein-air" sounds more sinister than "open air": one imagines a jaded Parisian twirling his mustache in disdain of all this egregious American health. But if Mr. Fiedler will explain how one can be a "poet of death" and not a "life-affirmer," and how Long Island, the Hudson and the Atlantic (not to forget the "mossy scabs of the worm fence, and heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed") can be fitted into "urban" poetry, we can be grateful in turn for his amusing account of Whitman's reputation, and his apt definition of the poetry as "a pun on the self . . . a continual shimmering on the surfaces of concealment and revelation that is at once pathetic and comical."

Whitman is large-minded, large-moving and instinctively graceful; these facts have a way of dwarfing everything else, until we can finally enjoy even the rhythmic excerpts from encyclopedias and atlases, or his crashing condescension to prostitutes and:

You hottentot with clicking palate! you woolly-hair'd hordes!

You poor koboo whom the meanest of the rest look down upon . . .
You dwarfed Kamtschatkan . . .

You haggard, uncouth, untutor'd Bedowee!
You plague-swarms in Madras, Nankin, Kaubul, Cairo!
You benighted roamer of Amazonia!

We can perhaps even enjoy the decontaminated sex which so often suggests the mating of buffaloes, in which the female seems to be distinguished from the male chiefly by her smell, or "that indescribable perfume of genuine womanhood," as Whitman phrases it.

The white whale still has life in it yet, still steams majestically along at the center of our inner seas, however many *Pequods* may have gone down in the century-long hunt. Lawrence's essay is probably the last telling thrust that Whitman will have to suffer, and this, as Lawrence readily admits, is the revolt of a natural son against an over-insistent parent, as far as possible from genteel standards of decorum or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

adolescent standards of sincerity. Lawrence was closing the books of Western culture and Whitman was his final text. "Whitman, the great poet, has meant so much to me. Whitman, the one man breaking a way ahead. Whitman, the one pioneer. . . . Pisgah. Pisgah sights. And Death. Whitman like a strange modern American Moses. Fearfully mistaken. And yet the great leader." Lawrence's own energies were running out in frustration and disease; unable to bear the thought of Europe turning itself into a museum, he was equally impatient with certain European survivals in America, of which Whitman's doctrine of "merging" was one. But this Tacitean, Saint-Simonian vision of Lawrence's last days is precious today if only for the poisons it forces out of our critical bloodstream. To go on in the same vein, as Dr. Williams makes painfully clear in his essay,[5] is to vaporize what Lawrence made exact and concrete. For the moment, at least, we don't demand one radiant, unequivocal center of our poetic faith.

But when you compare certain passages in Dante with a corresponding passage from "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Lawrence's Pisgah analogy seems perfectly just:

Lo giorno se n'andava, e l'aere bruno
toglieva li animai che sono in terra
dalle fatiche loro; . . .

Era già l'ora che volge il disio
ai navicanti e ènteneriscе il core
lo dì c'han detto ai dolci amici addio;
e che lo novo peregrin d'amore
punge, s'e' ode squilla di lontano
che paia il giorno pianger che si more;*

* *The day was going, and the darkened air*
Was taking from its toil each animal
That is on the earth. . . .

(*Inferno* II, 1-3)

Now was the hour which longing backward bends
In those that sail, and melts their heart in sighs,
The day they have said farewell to their sweet friends,
And pricks with love the outsetting pilgrim's eyes
If the far bell he hears across the land
Which seems to mourn over the day that dies.

(*Purgatorio* VIII 1-6)

(Translations by Laurence Binyon)

5 In Hindus, *op. cit.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pictures of growing spring and farms and homes.
With the Fourth-month eve at sundown, and the grey smoke lucid and bright,
With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous, indolent, sinking sun, burning, expanding the air,
With the fresh sweet herbage under foot, and the pale green leaves of the trees prolific,
In the distance the flowing glaze, the breast of the river, with a wind-dapple here and there,
With ranging hills on the banks, with many a line against the sky, and shadows,
And the city at hand with dwellings so dense, and stacks of chimneys,
And all the scenes of life and the workshops, and the workmen homeward returning."

Dante, touched by the modernism of his friends, the Cavalcantis, his face set toward the Renaissance, takes a long, tender look backward over the pastoral centuries, the pastoral "dream"; the "*squilla*" echoes mournfully in the ear of the new pilgrim. Whitman, so much more abstract than Dante, is the last great poet of an essentially rural America, an America of small manufacturers, the last to feel tenderly toward "stacks of chimneys." Two extremely different ways of seeing the world, but a common cadence, an equal tenderness and magnificence of feeling.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Steven Marcus

THE STORIES OF ISAAC BABEL

The publication of *The Collected Stories of Isaac Babel** should be welcome to everyone interested in the progress of literature. It brings before us the work of a unique and accomplished talent and revives the possibilities of a great but apparently senescent genre. In an admirable, informative introduction, Lionel Trilling has appraised Babel's achievement with compassion, educing from his life and writing the particular moral bias that informs them.

Babel's writing is most refreshing in its quality of directness—the style in which he addressed himself to experience and to his readers was calculated to be blunt in its effect of reality. Babel made only perfunctory gestures toward the contrivances of fiction; his stories are simply about himself—his experiences and his response to the experiences of others. Whenever he did write a conventional story the familiar, invented devices of the form plainly distracted him from exploiting his skill and intelligence. It was his great good fortune to discover at the outset of his career that his powers of observation accommodated all his other faculties to them; the brilliance of his registering eye made his use of any of the simpler literary means seem opaque, pallid and superimposed. Indeed, he was vexed by a self-consciousness of his superb aptitude as a witness, and he suffered Reb Arye-Leib's chastening without reply: " 'You have spectacles on your nose and autumn in your heart' " —not until his art reached an autumnal maturity could he bring himself to acknowledge with any satisfaction the handicaps of being an observer. His stories emanate a rare salubrity, the influence of a cultivated, self-possessed talent coming directly to holds with the trials of its experience. The canon of Babel's work is the story of his life, and because he could look at his life without being embarrassed by the very fact of his looking at it we are not embarrassed either, as we so often are by other contemporary writers who dissimulate their passions about themselves in the transparent formalities of "literature."

In another way, however, Babel is one of the most indirect and elusive of writers—no recent writer, not even Joyce, has managed a more

* *The Collected Stories of Isaac Babel.* Introduction by Lionel Trilling. Criterion Books. $5.00.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thorough impersonality. Babel rendered his impersonalness by means of a pervasive and extremely wrought irony. Irony, we all know, is an instrument of the intellect, and many of us seem to believe that it is virtually the intellect itself. That is probably because we do not often meet with an ironist so accomplished that he can deploy his irony against his intelligence. Babel's virtuosity in manipulating ironies was such that he frequently used it to fend off a warranted decisiveness, to blur a genuine distinction or to restrain himself from saying what he apparently had an impulse to say. For though he was a passionate man he severely mistrusted his passions, and in *Red Cavalry,* his most impressive and most flawed work, his irony served to neutralize their impact and to excuse him from moving in the direction of their prodding. He undercut himself consistently, finding, it would almost seem, a grim pleasure in self-contradiction, in the subversion of a story's design.

"Pan Apolek," one of the *Red Cavalry* stories, is an example of this unfortunate habit. During one of the movements of the campaign of 1920 Babel finds himself in "the ruins of a town swiftly brought to confusion." He billets in a church which possesses a set of remarkable frescoes and icons, the work of one Pan Apolek, an itinerant painter who, in the company of a blind accordion player, roams the countryside in "a state of blissful intoxication, with two white mice in his bosom and in his pocket a collection of the finest brushes"—the portrait naturally alludes to the culture and ideals of the Gospels. Apolek contracts to decorate a local church and becomes its rustic Michelangelo. "For five months Apolek, confined in his wooden seat, crept along the walls, around the dome and the choir." At the unveiling of his work the people of the town recognize themselves in the characters of the sacred paintings. "The eminent citizens who had been invited by the priest recognized Yanek, the lame convert, in St. Paul, and in Mary Magdalene a Jewish girl named Elka, daughter of unknown parents and mother of numerous waifs and strays. The eminent citizens ordered the sacrilegious portraits to be covered up. The priest hurled threats upon the blasphemer." But the common people of the town defend him even before the derision of their furious Vicar who insists that " 'He has surrounded you with the ineffable attributes of holiness, you who have thrice fallen into the sin of disobedience, distillers of brandy in secret, merciless usurers, makers of false weights, and dealers in your own daughters' innocence.' " Apolek, we are led to believe, is the genuine Christian of untroubled spirit and primitive faith. And then Babel pulls the rug out from under us by having Apolek relate his fantasy of the marriage of Jesus and Deborah, a maid betrothed to "a young Israelite who traded in elephants' tusks."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When Deborah's bridegroom approaches her "a hiccough distended her throat, and she vomited forth all she had eaten at the wedding feast." Shame overcomes her and her family and she is mocked by her husband. Then Jesus, pitying her anguish and shame, "placed upon Himself the bridegroom's apparel and, full of compassion, was joined with Deborah, who lay in her vomit," and Deborah bears his child. With this account, Babel has cleverly diverted the drift of his story. Apolek suddenly appears as a disgusting clod, and his literalistic faith a grotesque vulgarity. Whatever may have provoked this twist—his anticlericalism, his dislike of the passive or submissive character—Babel abruptly suspends his original affection and respect for Apolek; that affection and respect are, presumably, to be remembered as subsidiary ironies in the newer, more "complex" pattern of the story. It is as if he were on the verge of an experience very much like that which Kafka describes in "In the Penal Colony," and then quickly turns and walks away. Like the explorer in Kafka's tale he is too discomposed by his revulsion to allow it to soften itself in disillusion, but unlike him, he cannot even allow his revulsion to act itself out. Nor should we mistake Babel's vulgarization of Christianity for the kind of naiveté of taste we find in *The Man Who Died.* The quality of "Pan Apolek" was deliberate and reasoned; it was a vulgarity itself, albeit an elegant one—an unwillingness to allow certain sentiments to suggest their own kind of justification.

Associated with this restricting, deflecting irony was Babel's reluctance to extend a story beyond the slightest possible duration; his finest effects are hit off with the shortest strokes. Like many first-rate short story writers he was possessed with the search for the single right word or phrase. "The secret lies in a slight, an almost invisible twist. The lever should rest in your hand, getting warm, and you can only turn it once, not twice." Only the unquestionable trenchancy of his insights justifies the brevity of his best work. "No iron can stab the heart with such force as a period put just at the right place," he wrote, alluding to that paragon of ironists, the writer of *Proverbs*: "Iron sharpeneth iron: so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." And yet he frequently applied his ability to compress and foreshorten as he applied his ironic skill, to deflect and dissipate his passions. To the young Babel, literature sometimes seemed a deadly serious game which was played by hiding one's hand, by holding back secrets from one's audience and probably oneself. He negotiated this sophisticated coyness with the same facility with which he turned his irony, and his stories were damaged by it in the same way—it was a genuine embarrassment of riches.

Red Cavalry, in which all these faults are most obtrusive, is, never-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

theless, a modern classic, quite in the category of excellence of *Dubliners* and *In Our Time*. In 1920 Babel served in the Polish campaigns of Budenny's Cavalry, troops of horse recruited principally from the Cossacks. Many of the sketches and stories of *Red Cavalry* were committed to writing in the midst of the campaign, Babel's powers of contemplation being so mercurial that he could sometimes transform experience into literature almost without a pause.

Red Cavalry is concerned with an appropriate response to the life of the times—this straightforward moral inquiry underrode all Babel's complexity of treatment. He found that the Cossacks' response was appropriate and because it was appropriate admired and cherished them. Babel conceived the times as substantially Hobbes' state of nature, where each man's hand was ready to be turned against his brother and where if one's life and death were not gallant and glorious they would be poor, nasty, brutish and short. In "A Letter," Babel records with tacit approval how a Cossack father and his sons, on opposite sides of the Revolution, methodically and remorselessly proceed to torture and kill each other, communicating his sense of the propriety that lay within the necessity of terror. The Cossacks had been made for this epoch of carnage, and they surmounted it with "the masterful indifference of a Tartar Khan." Like Tolstoy, he saw in the Cossacks a conjunction of beauty and fierceness, in which their athleticism gave grace to their aggressiveness. "And he swung his well-proportioned athlete's body skilfully out of the saddle. Straightening his perfect legs, caught at the knee with a small strap, he went with circus agility over to the moribund animal." This appears in "The Remount Officer," where Dyakov has just had his horse collapse beneath him. The story continues:

> It fixed wide, deep eyes on Dyakov and licked from his ruddy palm a sort of imperceptible injunction. Immediately the exhausted beast felt a dexterous strength flowing from the bald and vigorous Romeo in the prime of life. Straightening its head and slithering on its staggering legs at the impatient and imperious flicking of the whip on its belly, the jade got up, slowly and warily.
>
> Then we saw a delicate wrist in a wide, flowing sleeve patting the dirty mane, and perceived how the whip cracked whining against the bloodstained flanks. Her whole body trembling, the jade stood on her legs, her doglike eyes, filled with love and fear, never for an instant leaving Dyakov's face.

This episode may call to mind similar ones in *Crime and Punishment, Hard Times* or *St. Mawr,* and it does not take much to discern in it a moral inclination at odds with them. Familiars of "Spotted Horses," however, will at once notice a likeness of accent.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Babel and Faulkner resemble each other remarkably, especially in their understanding of that state in which men are possessed by a passion so huge and immolating that they are turned dispassionate in consummating it. In "Prischepa's Vengeance" Babel describes "a tireless ruffian who had been turned out of the Communist Party, a future rag-and-bone man, a carefree syphilitic, and a happy-go-lucky fraud," one of his characteristically gay destroyers. Prischepa's parents were killed by the Whites, and he returns to his village for revenge. "Prischepa went from neighbor to neighbor, leaving behind him the trail of his blood-stained footprints. In the huts where he found gear that had belonged to his mother, a pipe that had been his father's, he left old women stabbed through and through, dogs hung above the wells, icons defiled with excrement. . . . The young Cossacks were scattered over the steppe, keeping the score." After the massacre "he sent for vodka, and shutting himself up in the hut, he drank for two whole days and nights, singing, weeping, and hewing the furniture with his Circassian saber." For Babel as for Faulkner, violence was the great cathartic and revenge its sweetest and most corrupting form. But the butchery of Babel's Cossacks is not the despairing, forlorn and solitary mayhem of Faulkner's Southerners. They spread their carnage gayly, for they were born to this existence not driven to it. They are as much like Faulkner's Indians as they are like his Southerners—atavistic, immune to guilt, untrammelled in their celebration of the momentous circumstances of life. Writing of the burial of Squadron Commander Trunov, Babel wants us to recall the Homeric funeral games and to esteem the Cossacks as if they were Achaeans. "The whole squadron leaped into the saddle and fired a volley in the air, and our old three-incher champed forth a second time. Then we sent three Cossacks to fetch a wreath. They dashed off, firing, at full gallop, dropping out of their saddles and performing all sorts of Cossack tricks; and returned bringing whole armfuls of red flowers. Pugachov scattered them on the coffin and we began to move up to Trunov for the last kiss." Before Trunov died he had murdered a defenseless prisoner, an old man, cutting his throat with a sword and then riding away. "The sun came out of the clouds at that moment and impetuously surrounded Andie's horse, its lively pace, and the devil-may-care swing of its docked tail." Babel would like us to believe that the universe conspires with joy in the Cossacks' bright brutality. And here, in his exaltation of violence, Babel departs from Faulkner who is as concerned with it as Babel, but for different reasons. Faulkner's violence mourns the death of traditions and institutions which he loved. Babel's rejoices in the death of traditions and institutions which he had come to hate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Precisely because the Cossacks were innocent of the traditional institutions of Russian society, Babel admired them. Having no piety toward the stations and duties of the old rotted society—existing, indeed, almost without any preconceptions about the virtue of society at all—they were delivered from any compunction about destroying it or whatever defended and represented it. For Babel they became the ironic embodiment of the Revolutionary ideal, the irresistible, anarchic simplicity that would execute the catastrophe of war and survive it as the first and finest fruits of the new society; for he had few expectations of industrial greatness or educated masses—the true revolution would create something like the Cossacks. He was more right than he knew.

In comparison with the Cossacks, however, Babel found himself miserably inadequate. As a Jew, an intellectual, a revolutionary, he was unable to meet the violent requirements of the revolution. When he is called upon to kill a wounded Cossack to prevent his falling into the hands of the Poles, he cannot. When he borrows a Cossack's horse he promptly afflicts the beast with saddle-sores. He wanders through a battle with an unloaded pistol, and convicts himself of lacking "the simplest of proficiencies—the ability to kill my fellow-men." The Cossacks, apprehending Babel's peculiar unfitness for his work, reproached him: " 'You're trying to live without enemies.' " Such, he confesses, is the fate of a man with spectacles on his nose.

But Babel did not castigate himself with any lasting bitterness for this failing. He realized that his time was unable to respond to him; it could not gratify his vagrant impulses of love. "Gedali," one of his finest stories, expresses this dilemma beautifully. On a Sabbath eve Babel invokes his childhood. "In bygone days on these occasions my grandfather would stroke the volumes of Ibn Ezra with his yellow beard. His old woman in her lace cap would trace fortunes with her knotty fingers over the Sabbath candles, and sob softly to herself. On those evenings my child's heart was rocked like a little ship upon enchanted waves. O the rotted Talmuds of my childhood! O the dense melancholy of memories!" Roaming through the *shtetl* of a Polish town, longing to share his nostalgia, he finds an old Jew, Gedali, in his curiosity shop, presiding over the things boys love and remember, "buttons . . . and a dead butterfly . . . a labyrinth of globes, skulls, and dead flowers. . . ." But Gedali disdains to speak of the past, of the Sabbath eves, and argues wistfully and uncomprehendingly about the Revolution—he too seeks an impossible communion, "an International of good people." In despair, Babel cries, " 'Gedali . . . today is Friday, and it's already evening. Where are Jewish biscuits to be got, and a Jewish glass of tea, and a little of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that pensioned-off God in a glass of tea?' " Gedali simply answers, "Not to be had,' " and goes off to the synagogue to pray. It was not Babel's fault that he and Gedali could not meet each other, and the pathos of the story is in his knowledge of his innocence and helplessness.

Yet Babel could not treat the Polish Jews with similar justice. And here, I think, Mr. Trilling has been too generous with Babel, for he tends to acquit him of his excessive hatred for and spite against the Jews of the Polish villages. It is true that on certain occasions their suffering exists for him as "a spiritual fact of consummate value," but these occasions are special and few. The Polish Jews were constant objects of derision and ironic pity before his witnessing eye. "In the room I was given I discovered turned-out wardrobes, scraps of women's fur coats on the floor, human filth. . . . The two Jews rose from their places and, hopping on their felt soles, cleared the mess from the floor. They skipped about noiselessly, monkey-fashion, like Japs in a circus act, their necks swelling and twisting." In his sight, the sickly, anemic Jews of Poland, the Hasidic Jews, were of a species alien to his Jews of Odessa, "the stout and Jovial Jews of the South, bubbling like cheap wine." "Hasidism kept that superstitious population of hawkers, brokers, and tavern-keepers in stifling captivity. . . . Human refuse and dung accumulate here for days. Depression and horror fill the catacombs with a corrosive stench and a tainted acidity." The torn trousers of a Rabbi's dead son reveal "the stunted, curly-covered virility of a wasted Semite." In contrast, "the captivating Savitsky," Division Commander in the Cossack Cavalry, lives with a Cossack woman "bearing her bosom on her high heels, a bosom that stirred like an animal in a bag," and lounges about with his revolver "lying against the bare skin of his stomach," the image of glamor and potency. Babel's denunciation of the Polish Jews was a great and cruel self-indulgence.

Just as the Cossacks implicitly stood for Babel's future society, the Jews came to represent the society he was engaged in pulling down. He felt that the hide-bound, tyrannical past of his country and his own life was concentrated in the culture of the decrepit Polish Jews—only the oblique brilliance of this insight could be equal to its calamitous untruth. In "The Rabbi," companion-piece to "Gedali," Babel sits with Rabbi Motale and his friends, the "possessed, liars and idlers," amid dingy and funereal surroundings, and the Rabbi, oblivious to the carnage and change about him, intones " 'Blessed is the Lord God of Israel Who hath chosen us from amongst all the nations of the earth.' " Revolted by the pathos of the Jews' insensibility Babel rises and goes to the railroad station where "in the propaganda train of the First Cavalry Army,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there awaited me the flare of innumerable lights, the magical brilliance of the wireless station, the stubborn coursing of the printing presses, and my unfinished article for the *Red Trooper.*" No irony is intended here. In the crucifixion of the Polish Jews Babel sought the humiliation and subjugation of the past.

Babel respected the Jews only when they answered the violence done to them with violence of their own—a Polish woman cries out "with sudden and terrible violence" over the body of her murdered father, or the Jews of Volhynia and Galicia who "moved perkily, in an uncontrolled and uncouth way, but their capacity for suffering was full of a somber greatness, and their unvoiced contempt for the Polish gentry unbounded." Benya Krik, the hero of *Tales of Odessa,* was the kind of Jew Babel could admire unreservedly. "Gangster and kind of gangsters" in the Odessa ghetto, Benya "could spend the night with a Russian woman, and satisfy her," was able together with his brother Lyovka to cripple his father, received a proposal of marriage while he was in bed with a prostitute, and was a man whom nothing could dismay or deceive. He was, in other words, a kind of Cossack. These stories of Odessa seem to me unpalatable. Aside from their moral dubiousness, they affect a folksy amiability and relaxation which are not appropriate to their intense violence and chicanery. Unlike the stories of *Red Cavalry* they seem to have been "gotten up" into literature, but Babel's deliberation over them was unproductive of finer or more humane judgments.

The trouble lies, I think, in the fact that the young Babel made a too sizable investment in violence. Mr. Trilling vindicates this investment by emphasizing the qualities of native grace and address that may accompany violence, and in doing so discriminates against Babel's principal interest and fascination, its terrific actuality—its "brain-spattering, wind-pipe slitting" turbulence touched him more vitally than the delicacy and coolness of its commissioners. *Red Cavalry* is a discussion of the multifarious ways of destruction, and it is not even so much a discussion as it is an exposition, for, unfortunately, nearly all of Babel's reservations about violence were *merely* ironic. In "Berestechko" the Cossacks commit one of their senseless murders. "Kudrya of the machine gun section took hold of his head and tucked it under his arm. The Jew stopped screaming and straddled his legs. Kudrya drew out his dagger with his right hand and carefully, without splashing himself, cut the old man's throat." Later the Commissar makes a speech, " 'You are in power. Everything here is yours. . . . I now proceed to the election of the Revolutionary Committee. . . .' " In another story he writes, unforgivably, and without a shred of irony, "Then I stamped on my master

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nikitinsky, trampled on him for an hour or maybe more. And in that time I got to know life through and through. With shooting . . . you only get rid of a chap. Shooting's letting him off, and too damn easy for yourself. With shooting you'll never get at the soul. . . . But I don't spare myself, and I've more than once trampled an enemy for over an hour. You see, I want to get to know what life really is, what life's like down our way." Here at its worst Babel's style was bloated with gore, "horribly stuff'd with epithets of war."

Babel's overinvestment in violence led him into active personal brutality. "My First Goose" records how he gruesomely slaughtered a bird and upbraided a harmless old peasant woman in order to feel potent and mature and accepted by the Cossacks. Nor should we neglect the fact that Babel later became a member of the Cheka—though no information is available about what he did for it—and that he went along on the infamous grain-collecting expeditions of 1917-1918: on three separate occasions he was somehow associated with the dirtiest work of the Revolution. Mr. Trilling would persuade us that Babel entertained a dialectic which poised the spirituality of the Jews against the carnality, the bodily beauty, of the Cossacks, and in which one criticized and qualified the other. Again this seems to me an error of generosity. Babel's frequent and ingenious juxtapositions seem deliberate and contrived enough, I think, to warrant the supposition that he sensed his overcommitment to the way of violence; and so he called upon objects and sentiments which would have the appearance of compromising his rancor and destructiveness—he sought a dialectic, but this search was essentially strategic. The young Babel was inspired by the negating passions; his one powerful benign impulse was the will to record and understand and convey. This impulse fortified his sense of the need for a dialectic, but it could not alone supply him with one. I do not mean to imply that Babel had no strong affections—indeed he did; nor do I wish to maintain that his use of irony is altogether spurious. But what may appear to be a dialectic in this respect, is, I think, more accurately a duality, in which the spiritual and the fleshly find it politic to appear together in print—like two enemies compelled to associate in public. Actually, I find, Babel's ironies and contradictions often tend to destroy, rather than create, each other.

Babel's affinity for destruction and cruelty may be understood though not condoned through his early life. In two sketches of 1925, "The Story of My Dovecot" and "First Love," he describes the most important day of his life—on October 20, 1905 there was a pogrom in Odessa. Babel's grandfather was killed, his father, "his soft red hair

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fluttering, his paper dickey askew and fastened to the wrong button," humiliated, and Babel himself crushed and terrified into a nervous disorder. He saw his father pleading on his knees before a Cossack officer who "rode as though through a mountain pass, where one can only look ahead." And he, young Isaac, who had just been allowed to buy some pigeons as a reward for his assiduous scholarship, saw his pigeons mangled in front of him. "I lay on the ground, and the guts of the crushed bird trickled down from my temple. They flowed down my cheek, winding this way and that, splashing, blinding me. The tender pigeon-guts slid down over my forehead, and I closed my solitary unstopped-up eye so as not to see the world that spread out before me." In one day the male line of his family was disgraced and emasculated. Babel accommodated himself to these scarifying hours by coming to idealize the Cossacks and dislike the Jews. By living as a Cossack, immersing himself in brutality, he hoped to cleanse himself and his country of the filthy past. *Red Cavalry* is his great effort in that direction. Several of the stories reflect the effort literally—"My First Goose," in which he tears apart a bird himself, is one. In another story he stands by while a Cossack shoots a Polish boy "and bits of brain dripped over my hands." And in a third he exacts retribution by urinating into the mouth of a Polish corpse: "It was pouring out of his mouth, bubbling between his teeth, gathered in his empty eye-sockets." In *Red Cavalry* he tried to rid himself of the past, and the final story ends in a hopeful self-deception. "Months passed, and my dream came true. The Cossacks stopped watching me and my horse."

As the years passed he continued to scrutinize his notions of the Revolution and of his Jewishness; he began to realize that he had deceived and indulged himself. Hesitantly, sorrowfully, he came to be critical of the unremitting violence of Soviet life, and as his trust in violence wavered he became increasingly involved in reminiscences of his childhood and lenient in his judgment of it. As his energy for carnage declined, he gradually ceased to disparage his Jewish endowments—curiosity, the love of irony, the love of ideas. He even asserted, once, that his savagery was an inherited gift too, a wistful and quickly abandoned illusion. And he perceived that the life of art had its own kind of violence, a self-inflicted sort, and reflecting upon Maupassant's final years his "heart contracted as the foreboding of some essential truth touched me with light fingers."

He was a wiser and a gentler man, but his art had faltered. He picked at his Jewishness laboriously; it was not an immediate actuality but a sequence of memories and ideas upon which he ruminated and by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which he tried to reveal himself anew. These later stories are the work of a fatigued and burdened talent—they took a long time to write, and Babel, unable to obey his own dictates about style, was forced to "turn the lever" more than once. Nor could he ever be at ease with the milder, retrospective sentiments; he tricked out his nostalgia in pseudo-ironic pathos, he recreated his memories and his Jewishness primarily in order to keep on writing about something. As he learned more about himself his subject-matter trickled away from him; his special talent did not thrive on the wisdom that comes with resignation. He had met life a ferocious young observer, and his best work was volatile, predatory and imperfect—with all its immoralities *Red Cavalry* is his enduring achievement. When his passion for "the state of nature" waned, his art, which in its way was a state of nature too, waned with it.

Before Babel silenced his own voice, however, he wrote one great story, "Di Grasso," which along with "Gedali" is his finest work. It tells of an Italian troupe of players that stopped at Odessa one year; Di Grasso, the star performer in a rustic Sicilian melodrama, portrays a jealous shepherd who avenges himself on Giovanni, the city slicker that has stolen his love. "The shepherd . . . stood there lost in thought; then he gave a smile, soared into the air, sailed across the stage, plunged down on Giovanni's shoulders, and having bitten through the latter's throat, began, growling and squinting, to suck blood from the wound." This beautiful, savage leap has a profound effect on Babel, and on all the Odessans who witness it. Somehow it gets at the heart of Babel's greatest and truest appreciation of violence in a way that *Red Cavalry* never did. Perhaps the most significant reason for this is the fact that it takes place through the agency of art: it is art Babel is witnessing here, not life. And when he says of Di Grasso's performances that they confirm "with every word and gesture that there is more justice in outbursts of noble passion than in all the joyless rules that run the world," one wonders if he does not now have in mind the violence that only art can properly represent, and that only art, by its peculiar magic, can cause to vitalize our moral beings. One wonders also if he does not now have a deeper sense of what constitutes a noble passion, and a noble violence. Certainly it seems so to me, for his description of the humanizing influence of the performance upon even the "tricky customer" Nick Schwarz, to whom Babel had pawned his father's watch, and upon Nick's grenadier-like wife, is an indication that he senses where the real nobility and justice in violence lies: in its power to evoke the non-violent affections, to evoke love, even to evoke guilt, and always to evoke our moral humanity. After the play, Madame Schwarz says, "Now you see what love

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

means," and with tears in her fishlike eyes she suddenly demands that her husband return Babel's watch to him—which he does, albeit with a "vicious pinch." Thus saved from his father's anger, Babel turns into Pushkin Street and "saw for the first time the things surrounding me as they really were: frozen in silence and ineffably beautiful." The violence of *Red Cavalry*—which was the violence of life itself—has passed. The violence of "Di Grasso"—which is the violence of art—has taken its place. And it is in the latter that we find the nobility and justice Babel sought. I think "Di Grasso" ought to be read after the stories of *Red Cavalry,* for then it would serve to instruct those of us who are so familiar with the literary modes of violence that we are inclined to forget what a monstrous actuality the thing in itself really is.

MEXICAN NIGHT

On the million Mexican mountain a heartbeat under
Stars real and abstract spread to horizonless arc
See, all is visible, feel, all is wonder,
And all is one: volcanic sheer of rock
And sky and earthling merged, past end of ponder,
Whole universe revealed, apparent in white dark.

Leading the mountain gaze, drawing halt mind from its cover,
Glowing centers of space or feathered millions of sky
Open milky ways, include frail rock and seer
In silver light years, clouds of dust nebulae.
You may say: I have seen all, the reaches of bright forever.
Then ask: How stretch the mind as far as the eye?

Lenore G. Marshall

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS

THE ANT ON THE GRASSHOPPER

THE TWENTIES: AMERICAN WRITING IN THE POST-WAR DECADE. By Frederick J. Hoffman. The Viking Press. $6.00.

I am a little ashamed of the difficulty I have had in getting through this book. I tell myself that it is orderly, well-documented, immune to the more ridiculous prejudices about the period with which it deals; a combination of the most admirable attributes of old-fashioned scholarship and newfangled criticism. It scants neither political and social background nor close textual analysis; its acknowledgments range from Mike Gold to Ezra Pound, and it makes no concessions to Communist-baiting on the one hand or to the ill-humored exposure of anti-Semitism on the other. Its canon of admired works rests on a consensus of the liveliest critical minds as of the very latest report (Eliot, Pound, Tate quoted highly—Robert Frost and Edith Wharton falling fast); but it is not unreasonably up-to-the-minute, and tempers some of the harsher current assessments. It is, in short, good-tempered, well-informed, inclusive, balanced—and thoroughly unreadable.

There are faults one can find with the book even on its own terms. However one rates him finally, one cannot ignore Frost utterly in a comprehensive history of the twenties; nor fail to say a word about that redemption of Melville which was the period's most important and revolutionary revaluation of our past; nor treat Faulkner quite so cavalierly. Nor can one really discuss Stevens' "Sunday Morning" without mentioning the word "Christianity," or confront Pound's Brennbaum and Eliot's Bleistein without saying the word "Jew." Mr. Hoffman is the victim of his own genteel anti-polemicism, as well as of his literary prejudices. But the chief point is not that the book is sometimes not as objective as it pretends to be, but that too often it *is*.

I have, I admit, a low tolerance for detached chronicling and cool analysis, but I have tried plunging through the book doggedly in the order Mr. Hoffman has imposed on it; skipping about on the basis of selected references from the index; opening it at random. Always I am bored. It is, I suppose, partly my own unregenerate nature. I long for the raised voice, the howl of rage or love. When I cry in protest, "But you *can't* be sensible all the time—not about this silly, annoying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

period—not about writers who have helped make our minds and who may even be great!" the author answers me, unruffled in the midst of his evidence, "Oh, can't I though!" And, God bless him, he can.

Mr. Hoffman's is not, I fear, a particularly lively or original mind; but it cannot, I am sure, be as dull as it seems to me. On the other hand, my distress cannot be merely a matter of the incongruity of our tempers. No, I am convinced that he is, in large part, the victim of his subject—or more precisely, of a difficulty inherent in our connection with the twenties.

Certainly, our relationship to that time is a difficult and degrading one; and what is most difficult and degrading about it is our awareness of that fact. How hard it is to be the sober and hardworking children of grasshoppers—and to *know* it! To know that we were born middle-aged, older than our forbears knew how to become; and to feel at once our own indignity and theirs: the indignity of never having been quite young, and the equal and opposite one of being forever barred from growing decently old. We have our revenges, of course: nasty and superior essays puncturing the dated poses of the survivors of the twenties (*The New Yorker* on Hemingway or *Life* on Faulkner), bibliographies, Ph.D. theses, collections of critical essays. These are, after all, coals of fire heaped on our own heads. No matter often we assure ourselves that the twenties overestimated the worth of their own achievement (and they did, they *did*!) and that we underestimate the value of our own, we must still face up to the fact that they had the nerve proper to their excesses and we have only the caution proper to ours.

In the eternal comedy of fathers and sons, we have been left only revolt against which to revolt, only non-conformism to which to refuse to conform. The only real blasphemy still possible to us is to write a history of blasphemies between the Great War and the Great Depression in which we prove those blasphemies merely manifestations of a deeper piety than ours—and this, I should be happy to believe, is the secret motive of Mr. Hoffman's book.

What irks our age and drives us to the more shameful excesses of "scholarship" ("After such experiences," Mr. Hoffman asks, "what forms of . . . defining . . . the human condition?" Answer: the glossary, the lexicon, the footnote!) is that we feel ourselves trapped among the clichés of anti-cliché that we have inherited from the great stereotype-mongers of the twenties. We should be ashamed to be as nakedly "square" as Fitzgerald, as unawarely sentimental as Hemingway or Faulkner, as prone to maudlin self-pity as Ezra Pound, as ignorant or as absurdly self-educated as any of these. Yet our irony, sensibility, ob-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

jectivity and culture have not made us capable of seeing around the great literary platitudes of the twenties.

All the novels about the Second World War could never convince an intelligent observer from Betelgeuse that such an event had ever occurred; for they clearly represent the reaction of sensitive young men to a conflict they had read about during their high school days; though, to be sure, they have tricked it out with exotic names from the back pages of an atlas, and have played out the trite events among coconut palms. Indeed, a veteran of the twenties like Faulkner can write in 1954 the same anti-war book he might have produced in 1924, as if nothing had happened since 1919—as, in the realm of the imagination, his and ours, it had *not*.

In the same way, no one has succeeded since the age of Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson in seeing an actual American small town or a living member of the Kiwanis club. The gross pathos of Anderson or the journalistic thinness of Lewis is beside the point; for all of us, the real facts of experience have been replaced by Winesburg, Ohio and by Babbitt; myth or platitude, we have invented nothing to replace them. Perhaps the most distressing of the stereotypes that have persisted since the twenties is that of Sacco and Vanzetti—that is to say, the political morality-play constructed out of the handful of facts about the case anyone was able to know and remember past the passionate fiction of *Boston, Gods of the Lightning,* etc. It is notorious how such recent quite different affairs as the Hiss-Chambers case have been confused in the minds of many decent people with the legendary event which reached its climax in 1927. An age which by and large thought of itself as "realistic" has taught us the odd lesson that not the real but the mythic prompts our feelings and actions.

We have lived for thirty years in the world of someone else's dreams: a compulsive world in which Lieutenant Henry forever declares his private peace, Sherwood Anderson eternally walks out of his office, the Artist forever leaves the world of Puritanism and Respectability for the utopias of Bohemia or Expatriation. To be sure, we do not all relive the legendary pattern, or even believe it; but we have been unable to imagine our choices in any other image. It is strange and revealing how little residue or legend the Marxist thirties have left; how little their criticism of the twenties affected their image of themselves; how naked we are of all but knowledge and irony among the monuments of the period: those undraped figures in noble poses still declaring; "Be Free! Be Lost! Have Fun! Make it New!"

Under the enduring spell of the twenties, we cannot convince ourselves that the clichés against which we must fight for our imaginative

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

autonomy are not patriotism, honor, God and country—but their mirror opposites which the twenties substituted for them. The world which the twenties invented in desperation and we inherit in smugness is a world in which we can no longer breathe. Their innocence and their assurance poison us; these are the bitter grapes that have set our teeth on edge.

And yet the twenties, which seem in one sense our Cities of the Plain, seem in another (or perhaps it is the same sense—for in all innocence they created for us the notion of Gomorrah as Utopia) our lost Eden. Indeed, it is as the Talmudist on Eden that Mr. Hoffman seems most depressing (out of such joy, such wisdom!) and the lost paradise of the weary scholar is inevitably the world without Talmuds. But it is not the "freshness" of the period alone which intrigues us—or even its mythopoeic power; it is perhaps above all the *unity* of the times, real or legendary, that drives us to despair.

For if the men of the twenties were lost (as they never grew tired of asserting) they were lost together, lonely together: a single "we" of artists, intellectuals and emanicipated spirits exiled from the single "they" of Rotarians, Y.M.C.A. Secretaries and Generals. In the realm of technique, the single phrase "make it new" presided over an alliance ranging from Mencken to Eliot, Sandburg to Stevens, James Branch Cabell to Arturo Giovannitti. The fall to division was yet to come: Paleface against Redskin, Whitmanian against Jamesian, neo-Catholic against Marxist; and the rites for Sacco and Vanzetti were the last prelapsarian celebration, a prelude to the end of unity as well as innocence.

It is an awareness of all this which has impelled us recently on various levels to seek to come to terms with our lost Eden, to be done with it at last. But sentimental rescues of Fitzgerald or Wyndham Lewis, or gallant last stands for Ezra Pound are beside the point—we cannot thrive on reconstructed truculence or repentance; these are the equivalents in the world of literature of popular evocations of booze and sex in the rumble seat. We must get past the barrier of the final stereotype: not only the myth of the Lost Generation but that of the Morning After, too—our last inheritance from the dying twenties, the image of Babylon Revisited.

Probably the only way to exploit the real comedy of the situation is to realize quite clearly that we are not dealing with an "actual" past, but with a tricky relationship between a literary image of the twenties and a present in part invented by that period, in part defining itself in opposition to it. Fiction seems the only device complicated enough to do justice to our plight; and in *The Disenchanted,* for instance, Budd Schulberg seemed within striking distance of the real point; but he had finally too blunt and earnest a mind to distil from the relationship between his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

young Communoid protagonist and Halliday-Fitzgerald even the modest insights Henry Green achieved in the more frivolous fable of *Nothing*.

Insofar as it is a literary work, Mr. Hoffman's study belongs to this series of comedies, intentional and unintentional. When he is not being victimized by the notion that the "actual past" resides in newspaper files, he quite realizes the subtlety of the relationship he sets out to describe; and he is admirably on guard against certain standard oversimplifications. Indeed, he has a double formula to protect himself against error: on the one hand, "the saving grace of an irony" directed against both his own time and the time he is examining; and on the other hand, "scholarly forms of ordering the subject." His irony, which is Eliotic in inspiration, I find a little ineffectual; his scholarship quite deadly.

Of all the great cliché-mongers of the twenties ("objective correlative," "dissociation of sensibility"—the platitude on the loftiest plane), the one with whom the contemporary critic has the least trouble is T. S. Eliot, a grasshopper who lived so long and became the slyest and most charming of ants. Mr. Hoffman finds in Eliot's own playfully deprecatory relationship with himself an acceptable method for coming to terms with his subject; and, naturally enough, he has little trouble in submitting examples of Eliotic verse to Eliotic analysis. Each of the eight main sections of *The Twenties* ends with a text presumably exemplifying some key tendency of the age: Traditionalism, Experiment, Critiques of the Middle Class, etc. Four of the texts are poetic—and they are all, of course, safely inside the Eliot family circle: Pound, Eliot himself, Hart Crane and Allen Tate. Such textual demonstrations are, to put it as kindly as possible, redundant; and they seem joined to the sociological discussions that precede them more by a determination to have the cake one eats than by any demonstrable unity of meaning.

If the spirit of Prufrockian irony presides over the exemplary texts, the spirit of scholarly-journalistic documentation presides over the prefatory generalizations. I give, tempering justice with mercy, only one example of the latter:

> Choosing some eighty-five writers . . . I have consulted such books as Peter Neagoe's anthology, *Americans Abroad* (1932). . . . Of the number, 58 were from twenty to thirty years of age in 1920, 20 from thirty to forty, and 15 from fifteen to twenty. . . . They had been born in the East (29) and the Midwest (25) for the most part; 8 came from New England, 11 from the South, 2 from the Southwest, and 4 from the Northwest . . . only 5 had no college education at all; 15 of those who had gone to college had not finished, the remainder had at least a B.A. degree. . . . Harvard graduated 12, Yale 9, Princeton 4 and Columbia 7. . . .

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This incredible attempt to substitute the methods of the box-score for the insights of criticism is, I confess in all fairness, Mr. Hoffman at his worst; but it is a not untypical worst—and it reveals the conviction behind the veil of irony: that the truth is in the verifiable, the statistical "fact." It is difficult to see how a vulgarized positivism could be pushed to more ridiculous lengths; and yet only last week I was sent an off-print beside which Mr. Hoffman's statistics seem relevant and subtle. It was a "qualitative analysis" of Currier and Ives (in seventeen prints one finds fourteen chickens, three dogs, eleven Negroes etc.), guaranteed by its author to introduce some of the certainty of social science into the shifty realm of writing about art. In this direction, no indignity is impossible.

One cannot, I am convinced, exploit such an approach and remain a critic in any traditional sense; and this Mr. Hoffman knows, for all his efforts to make the best of his two worlds. Confronted with D. H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature,* he takes his anti-critical stand. To me, Lawrence's book is by all odds the most committed, wickedly apt appraisal of our past I know, the nearest thing I have ever encountered to what our classics must come to be in *us* if they are to remain alive. But here is Mr. Hoffman: "Lawrence came to American literature as a fresh, original, in many ways a naive reader, not especially concerned with—and not very well informed about—prevailing academic or scholarly forms of ordering the subject. . . . In almost every detail the insights are Laurentian and worth while for their revelation not of the American past but of the Laurentian present. . . ."

"Not of the American past. . . ." One could never guess from these remarks that in Lawrence is to be found a defense of Melville written in the very teeth of the well-informed scholars of his time busy ordering their subjects, as well as what remains the only pertinent literary criticism of Cooper in print. Instead, there is the scholar's gentle snub and the scholar's failure to distinguish between the reconstructed and the resurrected past; with the final judgment saved, in the scholar's cautious way, for a representative quotation in a footnote. The quoted critic is H. I. Brook (and who the representative hell is he?) in the *New York Times* of September 16, 1923: ". . . you are driven to conclude that at bottom D. H. Lawrence is a bore, and, like most bores, complacently concerned with himself, bent buzzingly on his own pre-occupation." "After such knowledge," (as Mr. Hoffman himself concludes by asking in the apt enough role of Gerontion), "what forgiveness?"

Leslie A. Fiedler

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE PRIVATE PHILOSOPHY

THE PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY. By Walter Lippmann. Little, Brown & Co. $3.50.

REALITIES OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY. By George Kennan. Princeton University Press. $1.50.

The transatlantic dialogue today consists for the most part of European exhortations to America to brace up, get busy, and resume the march of progress; and of American admonitions to Europe to sit still, reflect on the past, and consider the merits of tradition. Each side plays devil's advocate to the other. For every European admiringly envious of America's success in mastering technology there are two Americans anxiously fretting over their countrymen's reluctance to build Gothic cathedrals and read Papal encyclicals. Propagandists are busy crossing the ocean in both directions, urging socialized medicine on Americans, or Thomist education on Europeans, as the case may be. With so much intellectual cross-fertilization going on, it would seem at first sight that the publicist's task ought to be getting easier; in fact it is becoming more difficult. Each side not merely has its favorite nostrums, but its own way of misunderstanding the other. Europeans see a potential Hitler in Senator McCarthy, while Americans mistake the parliamentary system for a version of their own democracy. Americans, too, are either for or against something called liberalism which has no counterpart in Europe; as European conservatism is quite different from the American brand.

Intellectuals are among the chief agents in this multiplication of problems. Politicians know from experience that almost any doctrine can be pressed into the service of a workable cause, and that once a course of action has been decided it will not be long before it acquires some theoretical sanction. Most writers by contrast are strong for the opposing view: that policy is determined by preconceived notions about the nature of the universe. Mr. Walter Lippmann for example argues that the growing debility of modern democracy is due to loss of faith in natural law. Let there be a revival of such faith and society will recover its vigor. Political health and sickness are traced to intellectual currents. Philosophers are not perhaps all-powerful, but "the decline, which is already far advanced, cannot be arrested if the prevailing philosophers oppose this restoration and revival" (*The Public Philosophy*, p. 178). This is orthodox Platonism. It became the fashion in Greece, if we remember rightly, after democracy had broken down, and it proved unable to arrest the further disintegration of society.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The special mark of this philosophy is authoritarianism—the belief that certain truths can and must be inculcated from above *because* they are in opposition to the common sense of the majority. This is something quite different from conservative traditionalism. The genuine conservative appeals to tradition as the sanction of the prevailing community beliefs and customs. The authoritarian school makes its appearance after the "cake of custom" has been broken, and in opposition to the democratic appeal for the establishment of a new, rational, consensus. Not that rationailty is ignored—for is not natural law itself revealed to right reason? But the historical incorporation of reason is located in an educated minority, which is also the ruling minority. "In the literal sense, the principles of the good society must be unpopular until they have prevailed sufficiently to alter the popular impulses. For the popular impulses are opposed to public principles" (*The Public Philosophy,* p. 179). It is not made clear whether this was always so, or whether the present state of affairs goes back to the time when the majority of people entered the political stage, i.e., when Western society became democratic. But there is a suggestion that the U.S. Constitution owes its rationality to the fact that in 1787 only about 5 per cent of the people cared to exercise the vote. Now this fact has been noted before by writers who have drawn quite different conclusions from it. It is of course a truism that democracy arrived by stages, and that its beginnings did not look very hopeful. For that matter, it is arguable that democracy is currently in danger of breaking down. But it does not follow that this threat can be averted by the adoption of an undemocratic philosophy.

It should be obvious that this is not a conservative doctrine, but one which registers the disappearance of traditional sanctions. Genuine "divine right" conservatism is of course no longer with us, certainly not in Britain—reputedly a conservative country. We have to make do with substitutes, of which the most popular at the moment is Whiggism in the style of Burke and Tocqueville. This, since it is itself rationalist, leaves room for such contrivances as a reformed educational system to inculcate sound principles. In a different form such ideas occur during revolutions, when attempts are made to reform the public mind by direction from above. The "public philosophy" certainly was very much in the thoughts of the leading Jacobins; Robespierre, by refusing to sanction armed resistance to a hostile Convention, even paid it the compliment of sacrificing his life to it. The Jacobins were indeed uncommonly doctrinaire in trying to force their countrymen to swallow the whole system of republican morality at one gulp, and in the process they not only came to grief themselves but very nearly succeeded in discrediting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the democratic cause in France. Still, on grounds of principle there is a certain bond between them and other moralists, and one would therefore expect some sympathy for them from writers who hold that political institutions are grounded in natural law, and that the majority must be compelled to be virtuous. But Jacobinism has a bad press at the moment, largely for reasons connected with the cold war, and Mr. Lippmann is severe on it.

He seems to have been unduly impressed by Dr. Talmon's overrated work on French revolutionary origins. It is becoming the fashion now to discern two conflicting trends in French eighteenth-century "thought": one liberal and tolerant, the other totalitarian and leading to Lenin. This kind of game can be played endlessly, but when all possible variations have been exhausted there remains the problem of accounting for Clemenceau, and through Clemenceau—in many ways the archetypal French democrat—for the fact that Jacobin tradition has repeatedly proved to be the mainspring of whatever public spirit there is in France; much as the demand for a stronger executive, which runs through Mr. Lippmann's book and causes him to be described as a "conservative" in America, is in France put forward by Gaullist and neo-Jacobin heirs of the revolutionary tradition. The best way to escape from these seeming contradictions is to admit that the "public philosophy" is not the sole property of disillusioned liberals.

That there is ground for concern over the present state of democratic institutions no one would wish to deny. Mr. Kennan, who is anything but doctrinaire, in his new book adduces some very good additional reasons for doubting whether democratic legislatures are really competent to formulate policy, especially "foreign" policy; although his sharpest criticism is reserved for the practice of passing high-sounding but meaningless resolutions at the intergovernmental level. Perhaps the two problems are connected. It is certainly the case that the British and other Europeans were constantly baffled during the Second World War by the American demand for generalized slogans of the "Four Freedoms" type. But since the British were likewise fighting for democracy, and the House of Commons maintained fairly close control over wartime policy, it is arguable that this tendency is traceable not to the growing pressure of public opinion upon the executive—Mr. Lippmann's chief worry—but to factors peculiar to the American political climate. In any case the "Four Freedoms" did not interfere with Yalta, though they apparently caused Roosevelt to demand some kind of face-saving formula with regard to Poland—something to show the voters, in fact. With the exception of this slightly discreditable episode it is difficult to think

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of any major instance where the Western governments during the war paid much attention to what their publics might want.

Mr. Kennan of course is dealing with a more specific problem—the influence of Congress upon American policy-making. On this topic the non-American can only say that it seems to represent an unsolved problem, but not an insoluble one. The more general issue of making sovereign legislatures renounce some of their authority in favor of supranational organizations entails practical problems of the most hair-raising kind, but none, so far as this reviewer is aware, that can be dignified by terms appropriate to political philosophy. There seems to be no principle that would forbid democrats to recognize the limitations of democracy, just as patriots may be brought to admit that the nation-state must surrender some of its sovereignty to a world organization. Anyone can point to legislatures—the French Assembly is only the most notorious example—which clearly would be much happier if left to debate such topics as the school-leaving age, with more important issues turned over to an elected, but relatively pressure-proof, supranational body. Since the whole trend of affairs in the Western world is in this direction, we may assume that discussion of the principles involved will become increasingly vigorous. One must hope that it will not become entangled with arguments from the sphere of metaphysics, for people who differ altogether on the substance of natural law—or even on whether there is such a thing—may yet be brought to agree on the steps necessary to make democracy work under modern conditions.

On the general attitude appropriate to a pluralist society Mr. Kennan is sounder than Mr. Lippmann:

> Let us, by all means, conduct ourselves at all times in such a way as to satisfy our own ideas of morality. . . . But let us not assume that our moral values, based as they are on the specifics of our national tradition and the various religious outlooks represented in our country, necessarily have validity for people everywhere.

Now it is arguable that values are inherently objective and consequently universal; but there is something pedantic about this contention, since everyone knows that a particular culture can only "realize" some specific values at the expense of others, which may be equally important to different people. Mr. Lippmann for example would like the Western world to believe in a natural law grounded in God; but if such a belief once more became general it would certainly acquire exclusive and dogmatic features, and probably need a universal church to uphold it. This conclusion need not frighten a Thomist, but it is not one that liberals can afford to toy with. For better or worse, the society we live in is dis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tinguished by its ability to dispense with unifying faiths of this kind. One may even hold that this is its most attractive feature. And if one believes that a new integration is needed to replace the fading confidence in liberal humanism, one may still think it likely that the new attitude will emerge spontaneously before crystalizing in a system of thought; its protagonists probably will for a long time look like dangerous radicals to the defenders of what one scholar has called the "inherited conglomerate" of community beliefs.[1] The fact is that restorations are rarely successful. The best hope for a wider acceptance of the "public philosophy" lies not in the forcible imposition of private systems of belief, however respectable, but in the removal of obstacles to human solidarity.

G. L. Arnold

1 Cf. *The Greeks and the Irrational.* By E. R. Dodds. University of California. 1951.

KLEE AND STEINBERG

PAUL KLEE. By Will Grohmann. Harry N. Abrams. $12.50
THE PASSPORT. By Saul Steinberg. Harper and Brothers. $5.00

Since his death in 1940, Paul Klee's direct influence has shown itself in rather trivial ways. We saw the unmediated use of some of his techniques in painters like Morris Graves and cartoonists like William Steig (the expressionist scrawl and the accusing black arrow in *The Agony in the Kindergarten*). The Canadian Norman McLaren produced some effective animations of Klee-ish images in films such as "Fiddle Dee Dee," and in a more general way, Klee's wit is not missing from some of the U.P.A. cartoons. Now that the "abstract expressionism" of Pollock, deKooning, Baziotes, Stamos and others has come to develop the authority (as well as the following) of an Academy, we find Klee being invoked again. It would be his name, even more than those of Braque and Rouault, from which Tradition-indicating arrows would be drawn in a "Glossary of the New Abstractionism" that is probably being prepared somewhere. One has only to visualize the parenthetical descriptions after the name: "post-expressionist—surrealoid —Swiss mystic (see Hesse)" to agree that a sober revaluation of Klee's work and influence has been long overdue.

One can have better hopes that such a reconsideration will be accomplished now that Harry Abrams has produced a wonderful volume with as good a claim to being representative as is possible in the case

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of a painter with an *oeuvre* of nearly 9,000 items. The forty color reproductions and the hundreds of line cuts of drawings have for the most part not been hitherto reproduced. The halftone black and whites are, of course, less satisfactory, particularly since Klee played about so much with delicate gradations of tone and mixtures of medium. "The Twittering Machine," for example, is poorly reproduced in black-and-white, as are some others in the familiar oil-on-wash style of the 1920's. Will Grohmann's voluminous text has been over-criticized for its disorganization and sentimentality. Though rambling and sprawling, it contains more data than we have had in monographs before, and the documentation (bibliographies, chronologies and a thematic catalogue) looks to be excellent. The whole text, scattered among the plates and line cuts the way it is, is considerably better than what one would expect from the usual critical-biographical study by a "lifelong friend."

Perhaps the most striking thing about the whole volume is the way in which it enables us to see for ourselves Klee's stylistic development, which even the largest exhibitions in this country have shown to be a series of more or less tentative-looking commitments. The book's chronological arrangement allows us to trace the course of the method, from its beginnings in Expressionism, enriched by a variety of German graphic sources from Dürer and Urs Graf to Heinrich Kley and Wilhelm Busch, through the more elegant influence of Klee's *Blaue Reiter* contacts in 1911, after which a recognizable manner starts to emerge. The period of the 1920s, during which he was associated with the Bauhaus and which produced the *Pedagogical Textbook* is well represented; it is during this time that heuristic color and form studies begin to appear, eventually mixing in with the mock-didactic tone of his earlier work. It is also during the '20s that Klee introduces the calligraphic marks, that, growing bolder and more pronounced, dominate the paintings of the later '30s.

What remains clear throughout is the fact that Klee never fell victim to the ideologies of the aesthetic movements with which he was associated. The European picture gallery since 1900 has been an ideological battleground, and Klee lived and worked through its most tempting encounters. Yet he was hardly touched by the determinedly excremental treatment of the picture plane by the Expressionists around him, or by the implicit "Let us redesign our lives" of the Bauhaus, based on the hopeful assumption that aesthetic and social problems are the function of as relatively few variables as those that face the designer of a fairly bleak factory. His own private mythos of creation need never be employed in rationalization of his work. Klee's concern

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

throughout his life was with what constituted the limits of a painting; for him as a painter, reality lay finally in marks, in images, rather than in paint on a surface. His titles indicate what the extension of these marks is to be. Despite his reverence for Cézanne, the picture plane remains for Klee the background, like the wall behind a cave painting, against which his images are meaningful. It is never the subject of his pictures, unless, in an occasional joke, he tells us it is to be used as such.

In a sense, then, Klee cannot be called an abstractionist at all. He depends far too much on the ways we are trained to look at things. He goes only so far as to suggest retinal after-images in his wash backgrounds, perhaps implying that it is the Imagination that we see with when we are not observing reality. His tricks are played only on our habits of classifying what we see: what looks like a cubist drawing of a head is entitled "Head Hewn with an Axe"; we approach a late, heavily calligraphed oil in a dealer's window, feeling sure that it has been stupidly hung on its side, to discover that it is indeed called "Lying Down." As representations of events, his images need only the context-setting of the titles and the *significatio* of the graphic styles to which his own elements refer. Moving more and more to the use of dark markings on deceptively uncomplicated-looking surfaces, he strove always to strip objects and relationships of the masks they wear in a world that often sees different things as different kinds of pictures.

In the light of the new Klee volume, it is rewarding to consider the remarkable collection of Saul Steinberg's recent work entitled *The Passport,* which looks to be culled more from the artist's recent exhibitions than from *The New Yorker.* It consists of drawings, collages, and constructions that he calls "documents." These last, for one of which the book is named, are calligraphic sketches that purport to be legal instruments, letters, stock certificates, a leaf from Rimbaud's diary, photographs and engravings. They all mean nothing, for they are made of marks rather than letters. But as records of the highly baroque visual styles that bureaucracy and commerce still maintain, they are ultimately documentary. Theirs is the strategy of the whole book, whose concern is with the fact that style is the subject of universal unconcern, that people, like the objects they put together, never know what they look like.

Steinberg describes clothing, architecture, human postures and even styles of drawing in terms of their black and white shapes; ultimately,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he shows how ridiculous it is that some objects resemble each other and that others do not. He uses graph paper for office buildings, loaves of twisted Jewish *challeh* for cars, wash drawings for photographs, photographs and fingerprints and rubber stamps for drawings, and continuous lines for both people and the worlds they populate. He makes up a series of pairs of married couples who look so much unlike each other that each is drawn in a completely different style, using cartoonists' and painters' stereotypes alike. Often he shows us how sad it is that some people are shorter than others.

With the exception of the documents, however, it is architecture that seems to dominate the book. The eighteenth-century architectural fantasies of Piranesi and Hubert Robert celebrated classic ruins and romantically juxtaposed them with Baroque churches and stables. Steinberg, loving structural intricacy in much the same way, goes a step further and imposes different graphic conventions on his actual raw material; conversely, by using similar pen techniques for Victorian horrors and suspension bridges, he paints up the overloaded ornateness that we seldom look at in structural steel. Like Klee, he continually confronts us with the treachery of our own styles of observation. After his brilliantly argumentative use of different graphic styles to represent the chaos of cultural fashions, he urges a final *reductio ad absurdum* in a series of nightmares of graphic logic, in which people carry various portraits of themselves, people draw themselves and each other, and, finally, a man pompously but pleasantly bears before him a vertical line. Steinberg's strategy is unrelenting, and pervades even the tiniest details, such as the different styles of picture frame that enclose the drawn photographs of the same woman from 1905 to the present. Perhaps it is the equally unrelenting sharpness of his satiric eye that prevents him from painting (which involves, after all, a serious commitment to the style that one creates): his paintings would only end up like those of a goateed and besmocked Mondrian that he draws at work in a Mary Petty sitting room. Steinberg never appears to look at anything without seeing, looming up in black and white around it, the visual context that makes it absurd.

It is perhaps this incredible sensitivity to the visual limits of seriousness that he may be said to inherit from Klee. His earlier work, like that of other cartoonists, may show more obvious influences, but it is only now that he has chosen to limit himself in a completely different way, that any comparison is possible. Steinberg has moved from cartooning, even in its broadest sense, to the same domain of visual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

morality that Klee mapped almost single-handed. The masks and disguises that Klee wrenched away from the face of reality, Steinberg now seeks to destroy by depicting them utterly.

John Hollander

THE ITALIAN QUALITY

MODERN ITALIAN SHORT STORIES. Edited by Marc Slonim. Simon & Shuster. $5.00.

We often say that the Italians are so encumbered by their great past that they have been unable to create freely in modern art and literature. This may be so, but it is probably more true that we have been encumbered by that past and approaching the beautiful peninsula like tourists with eyes only for ancient Italy have failed to see its literary present. For American readers continental fiction has meant almost exclusively the great French and Russian masters; and while modern Italy probably has nobody to put beside these, it has nevertheless produced over the last seventy years a literature of singular vigor and interest. Professor Slonim's collection is therefore something of a natural: it helps to repair the general ignorance, and it is a delight to read.

What emerges, then, from the present very varied collection is the unmistakable impression of an Italian quality, which is as powerfully sensed as it is hard to put down. The collection begins with a story by Verga, and Verga himself is probably the best representative of this quality. It is a quality essentially of directness, vigor, earthiness; and it is not necessarily realism, for it appears in the more fantastic writings of d'Annunzio or Pirandello, though it lends itself to powerful realistic touches. (Verga, again, would be the best illustration of this last.) The Italian spirit does not have the refinement of French taste: its vigor sometimes turns into crudity, its warmth into sentimentality, and its directness into the obvious. But for Italophiles these qualities have always been accepted as part and parcel of the Italian charm, and here the national literature is very much an expression of the character of the people.

To be sure, a certain aestheticism and aping of Gallic taste have played a considerable part in modern Italian literature, coming to the fore particularly during the years of Fascism. But these aesthetic graces merely played upon the surface, and wherever Italian writing came alive during that period it was with the old earthborn vigor of the native

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

character, such as in the three most remarkable writers of that era: Moravia, Alvaro, and Silone. Professor Slonim gives a good selection from the writers under Fascism, and his own critical text makes a judicious attempt to assess the literary remains of the period. With the post-War writers, however, the wind has blown from America rather than from France, and the influence goes much more with the Italian grain. What the French have extolled as the "direct grip" on reality of American fiction is a quality already uniquely and powerfully present in Verga. If you compare Verga with a French writer of the same stature, say Maupassant, the Frenchman is much more the product of literary culture and polish, whereas Verga breaks through the confinements of literary culture and moves thus in the direction of the Americans. Thus there is an inner logic to a collection of stories that begins with Verga and ends with Elio Vittorini, the Italian disciple of Hemingway. The book as a whole should be useful for revising some of our current perspectives on modern European literature.

William Barrett

The summer 1955 issue of

DISSENT

features a powerful & provocative study of U.S. intellectual life by C. Wright Mills:

On Knowledge and Power

Other articles include: America, the Land & Myth by Irving Howe; A Social Credo by Erich Fromm; Asia & Stalinism by Asoka Mehta; The Chimera of Conservatism by E. V. Walter; The Legend of Edmund Burke by Bertram Sarason; Matusow: Boomerang Boy by Travers Clement. Also: The Social Implications of Freudian "Revisionism"—a critique of Fromm, Horney and Sullivan, by Herbert Marcuse.

(Copies of the spring issue featuring Michael Harrington's critical analysis of the American Committee for Cultural Freedom are still available.)

Write to Dept. P, Dissent, 509 Fifth Avenue, New York. Subscription: $2.50 per year, 75c per copy.

Preuves

publie notamment en

JUIN

ARTHUR KOESTLER
La bombe H et le dinosaure

J. BRONOWSKI
Albert Einstein

THIERRY MAULNIER
Les diverses hypothèses de la "coexistence"

MICHEL COLLINET
De la technique à la technocratie

YVES GANDON
La vie sauve

MARCEL BRION
L'oeuvre d'Hermann Broch

ALICE ESTERHAZI
Une jeune fille de Budapest

LETTRE DE BONN

FRANCOIS GIL BONDY
La nouvelle armée allemande

PREUVES:

23, rue de la Pépinière—Paris (VIII°)
Le N° de 104 p. ill. 180 Frs—C.C.P. 178-00 Paris. En vente partout

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BACK ISSUES OF PR

now available at reduced prices—30c each (regular price 60c)
Any four of the following for $1.00

22 OCTOBER 1949: Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.—**The Causes of the Civil War;** Louis Martin-Chauffier—**Proust and the Double "I";** Angus Wilson—**Two Stories;** Irving Howe—**O'Hara in Samarra.**

23 NOVEMBER 1949: Albert Camus—**Between Yes and No;** Saul Bellow—**From the Life of Augie March;** Elizabeth Hardwick—**Elizabeth Bowen's Fiction;** Clement Greenberg—**Our Period Style.**

24 DECEMBER 1949: José Ortega y Gasset—**In Search of Goethe from Within;** Allen Tate—**Our Cousin, Mr. Poe;** Leslie A. Fiedler—**Montana, or the End of Jean Jacques Rousseau.**

25 JANUARY 1950: Arthur Mizener—**Scott Fitzgerald;** James Burnham—**The Suicidal Mania of American Business;** Alfred Kazin—**On Melville as Scripture.**

30 JULY-AUGUST 1950: Marcel Aymé—**Crossing Paris** (a story); Geoffrey Gorer—**The Erotic Myth of America;** Raymond Aron—**Politics and the French Intellectuals.**

31 SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1950: Randall Jarrell—**The Profession of Poetry;** Hollis Alpert—**Philadelphia: Plans and Pigeons;** Erich Auerbach—**The World of Rabelais.**

32 NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1950: Marie Bonaparte—**Poe and "The Black Cat";** Saul Bellow—**The Trip to Galena** (a story); George Barker, Horace Gregory, Robert Lowell—**Three long poems.**

33 JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1951: Arthur Koestler—**The Age of Longing** (a story); Harvey Breit—**A Sense of Faulkner;** Randall Jarrell—**The Obscurity of the Poet;** Delmore Schwartz—**The Grapes of Crisis.**

34 MARCH-APRIL 1951: James Agee—**The Morning Watch** (a short novel); Sidney Hook—**Philosophy and/or Agony;** Stephen Spender—**Reflections on the Literary Life.**

35 MAY-JUNE 1951: Elizabeth Hardwick—**A Florentine Conference** (a story); William Barrett—**Fitzgerald and America;** Erich Auerbach—**Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert.**

36 JULY-AUGUST 1951: Andre Gide—**Two Declarations;** Diana Trilling—**A Communist and His Ideals;** Eleanor Clark—**The Fountains of Rome;** Louis Auchincloss—**Edith Wharton and Her New Yorks.**

38 NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1951: Saul Bellow—**The Einhorns** (a story); William Barrett—**American Fiction and American Values;** Raymond Aron—**The Leninist Myth of Imperialism.**

ALSO: All bi-monthly issues for 1952, with exception of January-February.
All bi-monthly issues for 1953.

PARTISAN REVIEW, 513 Sixth Avenue, New York 11, N. Y.

I enclose ..... for the following back issues (insert numbers below)

NAME_____

STREET_____

CITY_____ ZONE_____ STATE_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VARIETY

Albert Camus

A WRITER AND HIS TIME

I. *As an artist have you chosen the role of witness?*

This would take considerable presumption or a vocation I lack. Personally I don't ask for any role and I have but one real vocation. As a man, I have a preference for happiness; as an artist, it seems to me that I still have characters to bring to life without the help of wars or of law-courts. But I have been sought out as each individual has been sought out. Artists of the past could at least keep silent in the face of tyranny. The tyrannies of today are improved; they no longer admit of silence or neutrality. One has to take a stand, to be either for or against. Well, in that case I am against.

But this does not amount to choosing the comfortable role of witness. It is merely accepting the time as it is, minding one's own business, in short. Moreover you are forgetting that today judges, accused and witnesses exchange positions with exemplary rapidity. My choice, if you think I am making one, would at least be never to sit on a judge's bench, or beneath it, like so many of our philosophers. Aside from that, there is no dearth of opportunities for action, in the relative. Trade-unionism is today the first, and the most fruitful among them.

II. *Is not the quixotism that has been criticized in your recent works an idealistic and romantic definition of the artist's role?*

However words are perverted, they provisionally keep their meaning. And it is clear to me that the romantic is the one who chooses the perpetual motion of history, the grandiose epic, and the announcement of a miraculous event at the end of time. If I have tried to define something, it is, on the contrary, simply the common existence of history and of man, everyday life with the most possible light thrown upon it, the dogged struggle against one's own degradation and that of others.

It is likewise idealism, and of the worse kind, to end up by hanging all action and all truth on a meaning of history that is not implicit in events and that, in any case, implies a mythical aim. Would it therefore be realism to take as the laws of history the future—in other words, just what is not yet history, something of whose nature we know nothing?

It seems to me on the contrary that I am arguing in favor of a true realism against a mythology

* This text, which first appeared in *Actuelles II*, answers questions that had been asked of Albert Camus on the radio and in foreign newspapers. It forms a part of *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* to be published by Alfred A. Knopf (copyright 1955).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that is both illogical and deadly, and against romantic nihilism whether it be bourgeois or allegedly revolutionary. To tell the truth, far from being romantic, I believe in the necessity of a rule and an order. I merely say that there can be no question of just any rule whatsoever. And that it would be surprising if the rule we need were given us by this disordered society, or, on the other hand, by those doctrinaires who declare themselves liberated from all rules and all scruples.

III. *The Marxists and their followers likewise think they are humanists. But for them human nature will be formed in the classless society of the future.*

To begin with, this proves that they reject at the present moment what we all are: those humanists are accusers of man. How can we be surprised that such a claim should have developed in the world of trials? They reject the man of today in the name of the man of the future. That claim is religious in nature. Why should it be more justified than the one which announces the kingdom of heaven to come? In reality the end of history cannot have, within the limits of our condition, any definable significance. It can only be the object of a faith and of a new mystification. A mystification that today is no less great than the one that of old based colonial oppression on the necessity of saving the souls of infidels.

IV. *Is not that what in reality separates you from the intellectuals of the left?*

You mean that that is what separates from the left those intellectuals? Traditionally the left has always been at war against injustice, obscurantism, and oppression. It always thought that those phenomena were interdependent. The idea that obscurantism can lead to justice, the national interest to liberty, is quite recent. The truth is that certain intellectuals of the left (not all fortunately) are today hypnotized by force and efficacy as our intellectuals of the right were before and during the war. Their attitudes are different, but the act of resignation is the same. The first wanted to be realistic nationalists; the second want to be realistic socialists. In the end they betray nationalism and socialism alike in the name of a realism henceforth without content and adored as a pure, and illusory, technique of efficacy.

This is a temptation that can, after all, be understood. But still, however the question is looked at, the new position of the people who call themselves, or think themselves, leftists consists in saying: certain oppressions are justifiable because they follow the direction, which cannot be justified, of history. Hence there are presumably privileged executioners, and privileged by nothing. This is about what was said in another context by Joseph de Maistre, who has never been taken for an incendi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ary. But this is a thesis which, personally, I shall always reject. Allow me to set up against it the traditional point of view of what has been hitherto called the left: all executioners are of the same family.

V. *What can the artist do in the world of today?*

He is not asked either to write about cooperatives or, conversely, to lull to sleep in himself the sufferings endured by others throughout history. And since you have asked me to speak personally, I am going to do so as simply as I can. Considered as artists, we perhaps have no need to interfere in the affairs of the world. But considered as men, yes. The miner who is exploited or shot down, the slaves in the camps, those in the colonies, the legions of persecuted throughout the world—they need all those who can speak to relay their silence and to keep in touch with them. I have not written, day after day, fighting articles and texts, I have not taken part in the common struggles because I desire the world to be covered with Greek statues and masterpieces. The man who has such a desire does exist in me. Except that he has something better to do in trying to instill life into the creatures of his imagination. But from my first articles to my latest book I have written so much, and perhaps too much, only because I cannot keep from being drawn toward the everyday, toward those, whoever they may be, who are humiliated and debased. They need to hope, and if all keep silent or if they are given a choice between two kinds of humiliation, they will be forever deprived of hope and we with them. It seems to me impossible to endure that idea nor can he who cannot endure it lie down to sleep in his tower. Not through virtue, as you see, but through a sort of almost organic intolerance, which you feel or do not feel. Indeed, I see many who fail to feel it, but I cannot envy their sleep.

This does not mean, however, that we must sacrifice our artist's nature to some social preaching or other. I have said elsewhere why the artist was more than ever necessary. But if we intervene as men, that experience will have an effect upon our language. And if we are not artists in our language first of all, what sort of artists are we? Even if, militants in our lives, we speak in our works of deserts and of selfish love, the mere fact that our lives are militant causes a special tone of voice to people with men that desert and that love. I shall certainly not choose the moment when we are beginning to leave nihilism behind to stupidly deny the values of creation in favor of the values of humanity, or vice versa. In my mind neither one is ever separated from the other and I measure the greatness of an artist (Molière, Tolstoy, Melville) by the balance he managed to maintain between the two.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Today, under the pressure of events, we are obliged to transport that tension into our lives likewise. This is why so many artists, bending under the burden, take refuge in the ivory tower or conversely in the social church. But, as for me, I see in this a like act of resignation. We must simultaneously serve suffering and beauty. The long patience, the strength, the secret cunning such service calls for are the virtues that establish the very renascence we need.

One word more. This undertaking, I know, cannot be accomplished without dangers and bitterness. We must accept the dangers: the era of seated artists is over. But we must reject the bitterness. One of the temptations of the artist is to believe himself solitary, and in truth he hears this shouted at him with a certain base delight. But this is not true. He stands in the midst of all, in the same rank, neither higher nor lower, with all those who are working and struggling. His very vocation, in the face of oppression, is to open the prisons and to give a voice to the sorrows and joys of all. This is where art, against its enemies, justifies itself by proving precisely that it is no one's enemy. By itself art could probably not produce the renascence which implies justice and liberty. But without it, that renascence would be without forms and, consequently, would be nothing. Without culture and the relative freedom it implies, society, even when perfect, is but a jungle. This is why any authentic creation is a gift to the future.

(*Translated from the French by Justin O'Brien*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IMPORTANT BOOKS from HARCOURT, BRACE

• • • • •

A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND
And Other Stories

By Flannery O'Connor—"Much savagery, compassion, farce, art and truth have gone into these stories. Miss O'Connor's characters are whole-heartedly horrible, and almost better than life. I find it hard to think of a funnier or more frightening writer."—*Robert Lowell* $3.50

AMERICA AT MID-CENTURY

By André Siegfried—In 1927 when *America Comes of Age* was published, H. L. Mencken, writing in *The Nation*, said, "This book is so good that it seems almost incredible. It is the most accurate, penetrating, and comprehensive treatise on the United States ever written, whether by a native or a foreigner." Now, André Siegfried reassesses the American scene in the light of our emergence as a leading world power. $5.75

IONIA
A Quest

By Freya Stark—"What an enchanting travelling companion Miss Stark is—whether illuminating family life in Smyrna, tracing the history of Ionic columns . . . or even discussing economics. Herodotus and Pausanias, familiar ghosts, are always at her elbow with a shrewd anecdote. . . . She will be hard put to it to surpass the present volume."—*Times Literary Supplement* Illustrated. $6.00

The New MODERN AMERICAN AND MODERN BRITISH POETRY

Edited by Louis Untermeyer, Karl Shapiro, and Richard Wilbur—A revised and shorter one-volume edition of a classic anthology of poetry. Mr. Untermeyer has been joined by two of America's most distinguished younger poets in selecting the 62 poets and 700 poems contained in this new anthology. The American section begins with Emily Dickinson and the British with Thomas Hardy. $5.00

At all booksellers

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY
New York 17

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FLOWERS OF EVIL

by Charles Baudelaire

edited by Marthiel and Jackson Mathews

For the first time, the best translations, from almost a century, of each of the 163 poems of *Fleurs du Mal,* compiled and edited by Jackson Mathews. Included in this definitive, bilingual edition are three versions of the preface whose publication was withheld during the poet's lifetime and his little known translation of Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha." **$6.00**

PETRUS BOREL

THE LYCANTHROPE

by Enid Starkie

Here on a vivid canvas is the turbulent Paris of the 1830's, and its colorful coterie of poets and artists. Here, too, are many of the roots of the dark influences of *Fleurs du Mal*, the charnel house, Dandyism, the revolt against romantic love and the industrial world. Dr. Starkie has used great skill and talent in her portrait of that flamboyant "wolf man," Petrus Borel. **$5.00**

THE SELECTED POEMS of Federico Garcia Lorca

All of the sparkle, freshness and magic of the beloved Andalusian poet are presented in this bilingual collection of over seventy of his poems, selected and edited by his distinguished brother, Francisco Garcia Lorca, and D. M. Allen. New Classics Series. **$1.75**

NEW DIRECTIONS | **333 Sixth Avenue - New York 14**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED